"Barbie and Ken - Creating and Sustaining the Myth"

The Construction of Gender in the Kindergarten

by

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This is to certify that this dissertation contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other higher degree or graduate diploma in any tertiary institution, and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this dissertation contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the dissertation.

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Abstract

This paper reviews the core theories which have sought to describe and explain gender differences. The major tenets of each theory are considered and examined critically from a feminist poststructuralist perspective. The specific role that schools play in the construction of gender is also analysed using feminist postructuralist theory and this analysis is supported by references to a participant observation study undertaken by the author in her own classroom. The research presented in this paper sought to describe and analyse the process by which young children are positioned, and position themselves, as separately male and female, when they first enter the school system. The study was based on teacher observations and interventions as well as a survey of parent observations. The implications of the research findings are considered in relation to appropriate curriculum provision and teaching practices for early childhood classrooms. The final section of the paper looks at ways to change teachers' thinking about gender. It provides a model for teacher-professional development programs which could effectively address the critical issues about gender and schools. It is argued that critical educational theory and feminist poststructuralism together provide the best principles for planning appropriate professional development programs for teachers.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a steady growth in the research which looks at how young children's educational experiences and opportunities are affected by their gender. Many Australian educators, Bronwyn Davies (1988, 89), Margaret Clark (1990), Pam Gilbert (1991), Lyn Yates (1993) have undertaken extensive research in Australian kindergartens and schools which has highlighted the profound inequities of opportunity which are embedded in Australia's education system.

However, despite the flurry of interest from educators and politicians alike, there is a growing concern that this research is not being acted upon, or if it is, it is having little effect on the status quo in schools. In May 1992 a report prepared by the Australian Early Childhood Association for the National Board of Employment, Education and Training concluded that young girls often hid their abilities, received much less attention than boys and little credit for success. More recently *The National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-97* begins:

> Education which leads to equality of outcomes for girls and boys has not yet been achieved in Australia. That this should be true, in a culture priding itself on a fair go for all, remains one of the disturbing contradictions of the Australian social condition. Equal outcomes from education are still not available for most girls. More disturbingly, many girls' education and employment prospects have been restricted by the gender constructs of Australian society - constructs which have been assimilated in early childhood and which are often reinforced during the years of schooling (p.97).

So why is it, that despite widespread acceptance in principle of the need for equal opportunity in schools and the plethora of research, progress towards this goal has been so slow?

It is commonly acknowledged among educators (Gilbert, 1991; Bussey, 1990; Maccoby, 1988 & Butterworth, 1991) that for a variety of reasons, girls' early success at school is not continued into the later years of schooling and

into adult life. Thus it has become an imperative, in terms of equal opportunity, to be able to understand the process by which sex/gender operates as a disadvantage and further, to intervene in the process if it is possible. And indeed this is the purpose of this paper. The paper sets out to provide further insights into how young children are positioned, and position themselves, as separately male or female, when they first enter the school system. In exploring how schools and teachers contribute to the creation of gendered subjectivities in children, it is intended that these new understandings should provide the basis for the development of effective and enduring intervention programs in schools.

The form this paper takes is not incidental. The actual process of coming to a decision about <u>how</u> it should be written is an integral part of the paper itself, because one of the critical arguments proposed throughout the work is that the <u>way</u> we come to know, cannot be separated from <u>what</u> we know, or from <u>who</u> we are, in terms of our specific social and cultural contexts and histories. In other words, the structure and the discourses chosen to present this paper should not be seen as separate from its content. The plan for this paper was considerably revised and the revisions themselves give important insights into a shift in understanding which I believe is crucial to any new understanding about gender. Margot Ely in her work *Doing Qualitative Research: Circles within Circles* (1991) talks of the interplay between affect and cognition as a hallmark of qualitative research. She and her fellow researchers (Anzul; Friedman; Garner & McCormack; Steinmetz) maintain that the interplay between the emotional and the intellectual self is an essential ingredient of ethnographic research which is seldom acknowledged. And indeed, for those of us schooled in a paradigm of positivism and empiricism it is a radical shift to see the affective elements of learning as being valid and important. This alternative paradigm comes under the umbrella of qualitative research and includes the research

sometimes referred to as naturalistic but, whatever the label, the essential nature of this alternative paradigm is the recognition of the interplay between what is done, learned and felt by the researcher. As Ely comments: (it) 'operates from a set of axioms that hold realities to be multiple and shifting, that take for granted a simultaneous mutual shaping of knower and known, and that sees all inquiry, including the empirical, as value bound' (p.2).

Shulamit Reinharz in her work *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (1992) uses the analogy of the 'quest' to describe the process of discovery which is often representative of much feminist research:

> Being a researcher - traveller means having a self and a body. It means abandoning the voice of 'disembodied objectivity' and locating oneself in time and space. .. It also means acknowledging that the self changes during the journey (p.210).

Thus, in identifying myself as a feminist educator and a qualitative researcher, I have chosen to introduce this paper by describing in some detail how I came to understand, from multiple viewpoints, the ways in which children adopt stereotyped gender positions on coming to school. It has indeed been a process of discovery and, as Reinharz comments, this description of the process serves to explicate and extend the readers' understanding of insights gained:

> Feminist researchers who write about research in 'journey' format, as a process of discovery of which the product is a part, demystify discoveries. As projects proceed, new experiences are interwoven and new voices heard. The work process of the research becomes an integral component of the issues studies. *The process becomes part of the product* (p.211).

Thus, this was *my* journey.

The plan was devised initially in the most simplistic, 'logical' way. Firstly, I intended to consider both the traditional and feminist theories of how gender is constructed and use these to guide my review of the contribution schools make to this process. I intended then , to look at my own class , I would watch and listen and

reflect. During this time I hoped to talk with colleagues, who were interested and sympathetic to the issues of gender-equity and also to those colleagues and acquaintances who were less than convinced of the need for intervention. Through this process I believed I could arrive at some conclusions that would guide my practice and give insight to others when planning programs for change. While I did not have a definite framework for action in mind at the start, I believed that after all this reading, listening, watching, talking and thinking, as well as taking six weeks to step back from the school context, I would be well placed to make some useful contributions to the discussion about gender and schools.

Unfortunately I had not reckoned on an encounter with feminist poststructuralist theory. Suddenly all my beliefs, all my ideas, my very 'personhood' was open to question. I could not even be sure I knew who 'I' was any more, that what I had to say today would even be valid for myself tomorrow, let alone for anyone else. I looked at programs that claim to counter sexist curricula and practices in schools and saw these as superficial. I wondered whether change was really possible if reality was relative to one's own perception of it.

After reading Davies' Shards of Glass (1993) stories from my own childhood came flooding back to blur my vision further. From my earliest childhood it seemed I had a subjectivity created for me which was not transitory, it was fixed firmly. I was to be a nurturer, a supporter, a peace -maker, a teacher - and I am. From the distance of some years I could not see any struggle for subjectivity. I accepted a subjectivity created for me by my family, my religion and my economic circumstances, and by default I accepted this as a gendered subjectivity. Understanding and believing that the essential 'I', the one I knew, had been created by an ideological discourse was genuinely traumatic. Even more so for a woman who believed she was, and had been, an autonomous thinker. I was reminded of the work done with girls by Gilbert & Taylor (1991b), and Hiller & Langridge (1992) which sought to deconstruct romance ideology. I questioned such radical scrutiny of lives because I understood how painful it was , how it tears at core beliefs, and how

it hurts to be positioned outside the mainstream. I did not like seeing things as they were or to know that I had colluded in the creation of a reality. Like the teenage girls who saw the scrutiny of the romance, as a scrutiny of themselves, I did not take kindly to being told or shown that I was being manipulated- even when it was true, but particularly when this knowing isolated me from my colleagues and my own taken-for-granted professional competence. I asked myself what could be taken from this experience, what insights could be shared?

The first positive step was a recognition that amid the disruption and discomfort there had been a growing sense of liberation. As Davies (1993) commented, 'by coming to know what is one is positioned to know what could be.' In understanding how power and powerlessness are created through cultural texts , I was able to recognise the discourses which had created my own subjectivities and was empowered to change what was disadvantageous. But, there was an additional imperative which extended beyond my own desire to understand possible alternative subjectivities for myself. This new understanding profoundly influenced me in the practice of my profession. I began a process of understanding how I, as teacher, create and maintain subjectivities for children and how they come to embrace these as their own. Empowered by this knowledge I began to nudge the familiar practices which create these subjectivities, because for the first time I recognised these for what they were.

I came to this position from my encounter with feminist poststructuralism and from learning and talking with other women; but most importantly because I had the opportunity to understand these principles ,not in abstraction, but in reality. I came back to my classroom as an observer and a researcher, and for the first time was confronted with power relations and struggles for identity which I had never noticed before. 'Teaching as usual' was no longer possible.

The dilemma then, was an awareness that lasting change could not occur in the isolation of one classroom. If children were allowed to be just that, children, not boys or girls constrained by historical or cultural discourses which assign power

according to gender, then teachers would have to arrive at a collective understanding.

Bronwyn Davies' (1993) comment that an understanding of gender from a feminist poststructuralist viewpoint 'allows us to engage in a collective process of renaming, rewriting, repositioning oneself in relation to coercive structures'(p.199) was the key to future action. I came to believe that it is in understanding how this collective process can work within a structured professional development ,program for teachers, that holds the most promise for lasting change and for the emergence of a new collective understanding about gender. It now seemed clear that inservice programs for teachers which seek to alter classroom practices, but do not begin with a profound challenge to teachers to re-examine their existing beliefs and values, were doomed to fail. I saw teacher thinking as the key to change and the place to which resources for gender equity programs should be directed.

This then was the process of coming to a new understanding about gender and schools, but what imperatives for action emerged? In what way does this paper seek to contribute to the continuing discussion?

Chris Weedon (1987) speaks of the difficulty of teaching students about ideology at a purely intellectual level, because subjectivities are created at an unconscious and a conscious level. I believe it is just as difficult if not more so, to use a purely intellectual approach in trying to change teacher thinking about gender. Just as the alternative discourses we offer to children run counter to the popular culture, the alternative teacher discourses run counter to the teachers' own pedagogical beliefs, as well as to the traditional ethos of schools. Hence this paper takes a somewhat paradoxical form.

Chapter 1 is a review of the literature which looks specifically at theories of gender construction. This chapter is written in a conventional academic style which seeks to be objective by separating the specific experiences of teachers from the theoretical analysis. This particular section

also, however considers a radically different theory, feminist poststructuralism, which asserts that no particular discourse can be objective. Feminist poststructuralist theory argues that a range of discourses must be made available to provide a framework within which it is possible to understand the construction of gendered subjectivities. It asserts that an understanding of gender can only be seen as relative to the range of discourses that are available to access a range of viewpoints. In deference to this, the discourse of Chapters 2 and 3 changes significantly. It becomes that of a practising teacher and it consciously seeks to engage the teacher-reader in a critical conversation about what it means to teach and how it is that teachers and schools create gendered positions for children.

Chapter 2 argues that teacher attitudes are critical to both the endurance and the effectiveness of gender equity programs in schools and that it is the teachers' own thinking which should be the focus for change. This chapter contains references to actual experiences of teachers, in recognition that new understandings can be generated through the recreation and analysis of specific social and historical contexts.

Chapter 3 is an account of a participant observation study undertaken with a class of four year olds, and which began on the first day they entered formal schooling. The research was based on teacher observation, interviews with children and a survey of parental observations. In essence it is the story of one Australian kindergarten in the 1990's.

As was alluded to earlier, the final chapter was intended to be a review of possible intervention programs directed at classroom practice but that, through the process of writing the paper, it became clear that the focus for change would be better directed to teacher thinking. Thus, Chapter 4 deals in some detail with a model for teacher professional-development programs. The issues which feminist poststructuralism raised showed clearly that any model of teacher development, purporting to deal with the

construction of gender in schools, should recognise the complexity and contradictory nature of the activity that is teaching, and the people who teach. In recognition of this, the model chosen is based on critical educational theory. The theory takes its founding tenets from the work of Paulo Freire (1970, 1972, 1973, 1978), who based curriculum reform on the notion of empowering teachers through a process of critical reflection on their experiences, together with action. In examining the relevance of critical educational theory to teacher development programs, I have taken a feminist poststructuralist perspective, and in doing so, seek to give practical imperatives for action to those feminist educators involved in policy, planning and professional development in schools.

CHAPTER 1

A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER

The study of gender has long been of interest to psychologists, sociologists and educators and this research, which has sought to describe and explain gender differences, has essentially been guided by some core theories. Cognitive development theory (Bruner, 1960; Franklin, 1977 Piaget, 1983), social learning theory (Kelly, 1981; Hutt, 1972; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974) and psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1977, Chodorow, 1974; Skinner & Cleese, 1982) have each been influential in educational forums. Underpinning each of these to a lesser or greater degree are the assumptions about the place biology has in the development of gender (Gray, 1981; Verrall, 1979). In any serious consideration of gender and its effect on human development, it is important to have a clear understanding of these theories as fundamental principles which implicitly and explicitly guide researchers, policy makers, teachers and parents. Furthermore, it is necessary to clarify the core tenets of these theories in order to understand the radical differences between these traditional theories and the new theories advanced by feminism and poststructuralism. In this chapter the aforementioned traditional theories about gender will be examined in some detail and then re-examined in relation to the challenges posed by feminist poststructuralism.

A note about terminology:

The language of gender research is perhaps the first stumbling block for those wishing to establish effective, meaningful dialogue. The discussion is fraught with misunderstanding as the vocabulary often used does not signify shared meaning. Rakow (1986, p.21) gives a good example of this

when highlighting the different aspects of gender that are often all conflated into one term. She comments that the terms 'gender assignment', 'gender attribution', 'gender role', and 'gender identity', are often used synonymously, even when these aspects of gender are not in agreement with each other. Clearly, definitions of gender are complex and are often only simply relational to the focus of the researcher.

A common practice among researchers is to distinguish between 'sex' and 'gender'. 'Gender' is used to refer to all differences between men and women other than physiological ones and this includes social and cultural patterns of behaviour and circumstances. 'Sex' is used to refer to basic physiological differences, ie. in genitals and reproductive capacities (Measor and Sikes, 1992). However even these broad categories have been seen as an oversimplification. Maccoby (1988) believes this type of separation fails to acknowledge how the two factors interact in any psychological function. She believes assigning terminology does nothing to simplify or make explicit the complex social connections of behaviour. In this paper the terms 'sex' and 'gender' will be used interchangeably because it is the contention of the writer that a contrived separation of the two serves only to polarise thinking about gender in a way which clouds the complexity of the issues, and renders ineffective many attempts to understand the process of gender construction.

Traditional Theories of Gender Construction

Biological Determinism Theories

The 'commonsense' theory of gender development is that gender differences are drawn from biological differences and that these are an unchangeable part of the 'natural order' (eg., Brain Sex: SBS television, 1992). The theory is based on a belief that the primary cause of gender differences

are chromosomal and hormonal. Few theorists would claim such a purist view, however, as Davies (1988) points out, even those opposed to discrimination on the basis of sex often fall into this way of thinking, without realising that they are doing so. Davies maintains that the 'natural differences' model is central to the popular wisdom about gender in our culture, and as such merits close examination as creating 'serious obstacles to the development of equity programs in schools'(p.6).

Davies (1989) believes that current research has clearly shown that it is fallacious to interpret behaviour as being part of a physiological structure.

> The idea of man and woman as bipolar opposites has no more basis in physiology than the conceptual division of the world into stupid and intelligent people, or short and tall people, or beautiful and ugly. The language suggests two discrete categories ... the words are bipolar, the people are not (p.9).

Davies' review of the research into the place of biology in creating males and females is thorough (she cites nine studies); she concludes 'there is no reliable evidence that 'male behaviour follows from having "male" genitals, hormones or genes, or that "female" behaviour follows from having female genitals or genes' (p.10). This is a confronting conclusion for the commonsense theorists. Biological determinist theorists could probably also cite numerous studies which reach the opposite conclusion, however the salient point here is that the conventional wisdom of 'naturalism' does prevail, even when the educational rhetoric contradicts it. Margaret Clark (1990) cites a particularly common example of this principle in action in primary schools. A teacher decided to ban toy guns in her classroom but met with opposition from some of her colleagues who believed she was repressing all the boys' natural aggression and who warned her that she would '*make them worse and one day it will all break out.*' Clark, like Davies, believes this constitutes a profound confusion about what a person really is, and how she or he became so. Clark comments:

> The difference between this teacher and those she refers to in this account is that she believes that children's behaviour and personality is socially constructed and that playing with war toys contributes to the production of violent behaviours and aggressive personalities. The other teachers believed that the violence was already there in the child and that if it was repressed or denied through the banning of war toys it would come out in some other way. The teacher who banned war toys saw the allowing of war toys as an active act and as part of a whole range of acts which produce and legitimise aggressive and competitive forms of masculinity. The other teachers, however, saw the banning of war toys as an active act, squashing the natural tendencies of boys (p.13,14).

Perhaps some teachers would not be so explicit in asserting the 'naturalism' of behaviour but nevertheless, do unconsciously, hold such beliefs. After consulting widely in Australian primary schools, Clark (1990) found that teachers were unaware of the contradiction between their espoused beliefs and their practice. For example, teachers saw no inconsistency in claiming that they treated all children as individuals and did not differentiate between the sexes, but still made statements such as *'Boys will be Boys'* (p.11). These teachers genuinely believed that they did not differentiate their teaching along gendered lines and yet they continually assumed a biological basis for behaviour. As Davies (1989) interprets this, these teachers believe the roles children adopt or are taught, are merely a superficial social dressing laid over the "real biological difference".

But why do such contradictions seem to exist almost unnoticed by teachers? Even espoused feminist teachers (like this writer) constantly find themselves espousing so-called 'truisms' such as *'What can you expect when two-thirds of the class are boys?'*

Bronwyn Davies' notion of an incorrigible proposition is perhaps relevant to this question. Her view, based on the work of Mehan & Wood (1975), is that certain core beliefs become so embedded in language and in cognitive patterns or structures of the culture that they profoundly influence and shape both action and debate, while essentially remaining invisible. This concept has been highlighted in the extensive research which considers

how a language system derived from a patriarchal society, works to position women in subordinate roles (Spender, 1980; Moss, 1989; Gilbert, 1991; Cowie, 1986; Kaplan, 1978). This is important research and while it is not appropriate to this paper to review such an extensive and ongoing study, it is most important to acknowledge that while the dominant language is one in which women have 'negative semantic space' (Spender, 1980), and in which incorrigible propositions are entrenched, it will be difficult to make explicit any new understandings about what it really means to be male or female. Further, in as much as people think with their language and create new meanings with it, women will be severely hampered in translating what they know (intellectually) into lived reality.

Although this issue will be explored further in chapter 2, in the consideration of feminist theories of gender construction, it is appropriate at this point to look in some detail at the socialisation theories which have such a profound influence on teacher-practice. Pre-service psychology courses for teachers in many Australian universities include compulsory study of both social learning theory and cognitive development theory; (eg *Foundation Studies in Education: Educational psychology* EED 101 University of Tasmania 1993; *Introduction to Psychology* BS310 PS10 Bachelor of Education Course: Launceston. 1993) therefore it is reasonable to assume that the theories have been influential in regard to teachers' beliefs and practice. Further, as noted earlier, the 'common sense' popular approach to gender, which sees socialisation practices as overlaying biological propensities, is as apparent amongst teachers and student teachers, as it is amongst parents.

Social learning theories

Social learning theory essentially articulates a traditional model of adult-child relations. It suggests that children learn about appropriate behaviour, roles and attitudes from their parents, peers and other adults.

Common to each of the theories is the notion of *identification* with, or *imitation* of same-sex role models. Society, parents, siblings, media and school provide the context for such identification (Butterworth, 1991). *Reinforcement* is another key concept, ie. children learn that appropriate behaviour is rewarded, and inappropriate is punished. Gender related behaviours are thus believed to be acquired through the reinforcement of responses that socialising agents (parents, teachers) believe are appropriate and the discouragement of behaviours judged to be inappropriate.

In its simplest form socialisation theory relies on an almost 'osmosis' (Davies 1988) transmission of sex roles - if the child is 'treated like a girl' (with all the attendant stereotypical clothes, toys etc.) then she will become a girl. The language of the social learning theorists relies heavily on a metaphor of 'transmission' or 'jug to mug'. There may be some argument about which jug (ie. which agent: parents, peers, media, school etc.) has the most profound influence, but essentially a great deal of teacher practice, and indeed many intervention programs designed to achieve gender equity, are based on a simplistic model of direct transmission of knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.

Bussey (1990) notes two other important facets of this theory of socialisation. She points out that the social learning theorists believe that children learn behaviour appropriate to both sexes, but that they prefer to perform responses of same-sex models because they are consistently rewarded for this. Social learning theory also acknowledges that gender appropriate behaviour is governed by self-control processes, in that children learn that the social environment holds consistent expectations of same-sex type behaviour; hence the child soon learns to dispense self-praise for sex-appropriate behaviour and self-censure for behaving in a cross-sex fashion (p.95).

As Davies (1988) points out, socialisation theory is very appealing because it seems to provide a ready 'cause and effect' explanation for the way people are. However, as Clark (1990) notes, there is a considerable paradox between what teachers say they believe about how children learn, and how this actually works in the classroom. Teachers seemed to find no contradiction in explaining children's behaviour with comments like '*What can you expect from the kid, with a father like that*' while, on the other hand, planning teaching programs based on the premise that children are autonomous thinkers. Given the considerable period of time children are at school and teachers'positions of authority within the school hierarchy , it is reasonable to assume that teachers could be powerful agents of a change towards more egalitarian patterns of behaviour, social positions and interactions between the sexes. It is naive however, to ignore that teachers themselves are products of social and cultural conditioning. This concept merits closer exploration in terms of how liberal humanism has come to be viewed as the 'natural' and most powerful of teacher pedagogies and will be considered specifically in a later chapter which focuses on the role schools play in constructing and maintaining the gender stereotypes.

It is important though, to acknowledge just how difficult it is for parents and the family (the child's first socialising agent) to provide alternative social conditioning. Bussey (1990) points out that even when there is a conscious effort to socialise children in accordance with other goals unrelated to gender, there are so many unconscious pressures on parents to cast children into gender related roles, that these egalitarian ideals are rarely achieved. Bussey cites numerous studies which highlight how from the moment of birth, parents label and interpret their baby's behaviour, and appearance, according to their sex/gender. One particular study, the David or Diana study (in Bussey 1990, p.97), found that adults perceived an infant's mild distress reaction to a jack-in-the-box as anger, if they believed the child

was a boy, and the same response as fear, if they believed the baby was a girl. As Bussey comments, because parents know that the sex of their child does profoundly influence how others react to them, it is very important to the parents that others should recognise the sex of their child. It is therefore not surprising that they choose babies' clothing, toys, bedrooms specifically along stereotyped gender lines.

So is there a problem with this? What difference does it make if parents, even unconsciously, delight in having their children recognised as boys or girls? Bussey highlights a profound problem with this differential treatment. She notes that there is ample research to show that children's formation of a self-image is significantly determined by others' responses to them and because most parents and other individuals respond differently to boys and girls, it is reasonable to assert that children's self-image will reflect this differential treatment. Bussey cites one study which showed parents were more likely to interrupt the speech of girls than boys and she comments on the implications of this:

> This lack of respect for what girls have to say in comparison with boys makes it easy for girls to draw the conclusion that what they have to say is unimportant and not worth listening to. Parents may not necessarily wish to communicate such an opinion to their daughters, but the lack of power invested in the female role is so entrenched in our society and so much gender-socialisation occurs at a non-conscious level that it is very difficult to alter these attitudes (p.98).

There have also been numerous studies into the effect gender stereotyping has on children's play experiences (Maccoby, 1988; Pitcher & Schultz 1983; Bussey & Bandura, 1992; Bussey, 1990). These studies found that children develop a sense of mastery associated with the toys and play experiences presented to them by parents and other adults. As Bussey (1990) points out, because most parents still present their children with sex stereotyped toys these are seen by the children to be the most valid and thus the children build a sense of competence with toys and activities which have

been designated as sex appropriate. In reality, it is not just a 'sense' of competence; children in fact do become more competent at particular sex stereotyped activities and this imbalance of mastery of activities only reinforces the popular wisdom of biological determinism. And indeed, it also serves to maintain the imbalance of power relations because boy-type play and interests have more status in a patriarchal society, than do the interests of girls.

A similar 'chicken and egg' proposition operates in peer relations. A number of studies, including Hartup, 1983; Lockheed and Klein, 1985; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1987 (cited by Maccoby, 1988) showed clearly that pre-school age children prefer same-sex grouping and that this preference is quite resistant to modification by adults. There is also ample evidence that pre-school children resist strongly any challenge to the stereotypes and that they are quite forceful in the sex-typing pressure they exact from peers. Pitcher and Schultz (1983) found that young children were quite ready to ridicule peers without mercy for deviations from sex appropriate behaviour and that boys, more than girls, tend to put extra negative pressure on sex-deviant behaviour in other boys. A study by Stoddart and Turiel (1985) confirmed this and also noted that young children and adolescents regarded crossing of stereotyped gender boundaries as a greater transgression, and expressed a greater personal commitment to sex role and regularity, than did children in middle childhood. Clearly peer relations contribute significantly to the construction of gender but the question remains; exactly <u>how</u> does this operate? One could interpret this preference for same sex peers as children acting 'instinctively', but alternatively children's preference for peers could be seen to be socially constructed, just as toy and game preferences are.

The behaviour of peers and parents however can never be considered in isolation from that culture, in which they are embedded, and indeed, to which they contribute. This culture impacts most profoundly in positioning

children in sex-stereotyped roles because of the multiple levels upon which it works. And, as Davies (1993. p.9) points out, this subtle process often goes unrecognised or is profoundly mis interpreted. Davies refers to the research of Walkerdine and Lucy (1984) in which an analysis of interactions between mothers and daughters revealed, ' the work mothers do to create the belief in their daughters that they have the freedom to choose, at the same time subjecting them to a set of values that will shape their choices.' This lack of agency afforded to children is often unrecognised because the inherent power relationships which are assumed within a particular discourse, are also unrecognised. There has been extensive research into the influence of the popular culture in socialising girls into stereotyped positions and recently, specific research into how the romance ideology of popular cultural texts contributes to this process (Hiller & Langridge, 1993). Perhaps one of the most significant propositions which emerges from this latter research is that, the power of the romance discourse is so great, that girls are prepared, not only to disregard personal values to fit into the mould of traditional romance, thereby indicating to society their 'normality', but were even prepared to ignore their own lived-reality to ensure compliance with cultural norms.

In a classroom study undertaken with a group of five year old girls (Mawson, 1992), children's culturally stereotyped beliefs about grandmothers were considered, and challenged with the children. Initially the girls were asked - '*What do grandmas do?.*' The responses all indicated a narrow, romanticised view that nurturing and caring for men and children were the primary roles of grandmothers. The girls said '*grandmas give treats, look after grandpa, play bowls, read me stories, etc.*' Later, during the intervention stage of the research, the children were asked to interview their own grandmothers, and in the meantime they were exposed to a number of alternative texts which showed grandmothers in multiple roles. The

children's interviews with their grandmothers showed that their grandmothers were engaged in a range of paid and unpaid work but even after the various interventions, the interviews, the group discussions and the stories, the study found that the girls rejected their own lived reality in favour of the traditional, romantic view of grandmothers.

Bussey and Bandura (1992, p.1249) throw some light on this apparent contradiction. They point out that society offers no incentives for disengaging stereotypic gender-linked standards. In other words, parents or teachers may model gender egalitarianism but unless the peer groups and other significant elements in the culture endorse this, then it is unlikely that stereotypic gender standards will be altered by the child.

What is apparent then is that the child herself does make decisions about her gender position and that she is not a passive recipient of adult knowledge. This is an important concept in understanding the process of becoming gendered. The notion of the child as an active agent in adopting gender positions is a core principle of cognitive development theories and as such merits closer consideration.

Cognitive Development Theory

While social learning theory postulates that children learn by imitation, cognitive development theory (specifically Piagetian Cognitive theory) postulates that children's learning follows a developmental progression. Piaget's cognitive development theory asserts that children's learning about gender and sex role behaviour occurs in identifiable stages and that this learning is in response to a variety of experiences. The theory sees the child as motivated primarily by a desire to be competent. In her attempt to understand the world she develops a number of categories as organising principles. Sex/gender is seen as a basic organising category. The research of developmental psychologists shows that by four years old,

most children appear to use gender labels correctly to themselves and other children. Maccoby (1988) points out that gender labels appear to be a basic organising category of all cultures and that children learn to apply these as they simultaneously acquire an array of sex typed behaviours, which society presents to them as sex-appropriate behaviour. Children then devise clusters of attributes which they label masculine or feminine and try to copy the appropriate cluster of behaviour.

Kohlberg's research (1966, 1969) is representative of the traditional cognitive developmental school. The notion of 'gender constancy', is a core concept and Kohlberg's definition of this implies that sex is a permanent attribute tied to underlying biological properties. Theorists of this school believe the attainment of gender constancy progresses through clearly definable stages of understanding. The development begins with the child simply being able to identify herself as a girl, then moves to the child recognising that gender remains stable over time, to a final stage (at about 6 years old) where the child sees gender as consistent or invariant, despite outward changes of appearance. The cognitive developmental theorist sees this model of gender constancy as consistent with a view of the child as an active agent trying to make sense of a complex world by seeking to position herself in a category which is consistent with her gender label.

Kohlberg's theory that gender constancy is a pre-requisite for gender development however finds little support in contemporary research. Bussey (1990) gives a comprehensive review of research into this and in doing so highlights many problems with the theory, most notably that irrespective of gender constancy level, children were more likely to imitate the behaviour of same sex rather than opposite-sex models, and that there is no relationship between sex role stereotypes or preferences for same sex activities (p.93). A later study by Bussey and Bandura (1992) also concluded that neither gender knowledge nor gender constancy predicted gender linked behaviour.

Studies into children's cross-gender activities (Stoddart & Turiel, 1985) and children's play preferences (Maccoby, 1988) and peer relationships (Pitcher & Schultz, 1983) all concluded that young children (3 and 4 year olds) who in Kohlberg's terms would not have achieved gender constancy, show marked preference for same-sex groupings and that only a limited knowledge of sex-role stereotypes is all that is necessary for much early sex typing to occur. Clearly there are other explanations for this behaviour. Nevertheless, despite the inadequacies of Kohlberg's gender constancy concept, cognitive developmental theory proposes a picture of the child as an active participant in structuring her/his experience and formulating sex roles. Perhaps, because this rests comfortably with a philosophical notion of children as autonomous thinkers, it has wide support in the educational community.

Piagetian cognitive development theory in essence deems children to be self-socialising. Because of their innate urge for competence, children are seen first to develop the categories and then to fit themselves into these categories. The problem of course arises if we ask ourselves whether, given the powerful social/cultural conditioning at work, the child really does have any choice at all in devising the categories or maintaining them.

Clearly there are links with social learning theory which in combination with cognitive theory, could provide a more coherent picture of the process of gender construction. Feminist researchers (Walkerdine, 1990; Gilbert & Taylor, 1991; Davies 1989, 1993; Weedon, 1987) however, challenge such eclectic views of gender development which sees biology and socio/cultural influences as simply layered one on top of the other and instead they raise fundamental questions about the very nature of our gender system and its origins. They question not just the suitability of the categories but also the need to divide, to polarise or to use gender as a social category in the first place. These feminist theorists do not ask questions about the nature of the role-models but rather about the constraints imposed

by the rules and structures of the social world, which, constantly deprive women and children and other marginalised groups of agency (Davies 1993 p.9). As Davies points out, it is inappropriate to consider children as being autonomous agents when 'their subject status is never fully guaranteed. It is always partial and conditional'.

Psychoanalytic Theories

Before leaving the traditional theories for a consideration of these feminist perspectives it is important to acknowledge the psychoanalytic theories which also contribute to the debate.

Psychoanalytic theories draw our attention to the emotional processes, deep-seated conflicts and feelings that are inherent in every child. A core concept is that of *attachment*, ie. the attachment a child has to the mother, and later, the process of separation which is an inevitable consequence of growing up. Freud (1977) is seen as the founder of psychoanalytic theory and proposed that this process of separation occurs in clearly defined stages. A key point of these theories is that the process of separation is different for boys than girls. Measor & Sikes (1992) summarise the research of Chodorow (1974) and Skinner & Cleese (1982) into this difference:

> ... boys have to break away from their early identification with their mother and solve the problem of what masculinity is and means. For girls, early development is more continuous and femininity can be easily understood in terms of motherhood. Boys, by contrast, are faced with a constant task of constructing masculinity. Boys need a set of social symbols to signal masculinity.(p.12).

Some feminist researchers (Firestone 1972, Millet 1977 cited *in* Weedon 1987 p.44),have criticised psychoanalytic theories as presenting a deficit model of femininity in that they imply women have failed to mature in a psychological sense, but many French feminists (Kristeva 1974; Irigaray,1977, *in* Weedon 1987; Cixous, 1980;) have modified and developed the post-Freudian perspective further, in their consideration of the relationship between the patriarchal order and language. Some of the founding tenets of

French feminism are taken from Lacan's model which sees human subjectivity as constituted both developmentally and structurally in relation to language. Kuhn (1981) comments:

> According to the Lacanian model, the human subject is not only a speaking subject with an unconscious, but also a masculine or feminine subject in relation to the Oedipus complex. Sexual difference is seen as structured by the subject's relation to the phallus, the signifier which stands in for the play of absence and presence that constitutes language. Because the oedipal moment inaugurates sexual difference in relation to the phallus as signifier, men and women enter language differently, and Lacan's argument is that the female entry into language is organised by lack, or negativity (p.37).

It should be noted however that despite many criticisms of psychoanalytic theories, some feminists, as Measor and Sikes (1992) point out, have re-examined the theories and concluded that the research actually points more to the precarious nature of masculinity, rather than the deficiency of the feminine. Whatever the ultimate view, it is reasonable to conclude that psychoanalytic theory makes one very specific contribution to a coherent understanding of gender construction. It incorporates an affective, emotional component, not considered by social learning theory or cognitive development theory. Social learning theory implies a crude transmission model, while cognitive development theory emphasises the child's knowledge that enables her to make categorisations, with no references to the part played by emotions, values or culturally embedded beliefs.

It will be argued in some detail later in this paper, that because the affective component of learning is given so little validity by most mainstream theories, new understandings about the construction of gender have been slow to emerge. While the discourse about gender construction continues to be dominated by discrete theories of social learning and cognitive development there is very limited scope to extend teachers' or researchers' knowledge of this process, that is , to understand the influence

of social and historical structures in determining an individual's view of *self,* and of her gender. A feminist poststructuralist perspective does not see that the creation of gender as separate from the creation of self. Indeed, feminist poststructuralism sees the separation of the rational, social and feeling self, as counter-productive to an understanding of the subtle and complex process whereby a person's sense of self is actually determined by a social organisation which affords power according to gender. It is this theory to which I now turn.

The Construction of Gender: a feminist perspective on the traditional theories

While there are many different perspectives on feminism itself, it is possible to extract some core principles which sets a feminist view of gender apart from traditional perspectives. Central to the feminist perspective is the notion that society has created and sustained the bipolar view of males and females and that this social construction has more to do with power relations than biology.

Liberal feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism and psychoanalytic feminism all struggle with, and attempt to clarify, issues of power, politics, historical precedent and language. Weedon in *Feminist Practice and Post Structuralist Theory* (1987) argues very persuasively that a feminist version of poststructuralist theory can offer a unified focus on all these core issues and clarifies the relationship between language, subjectivity, social organisation and power. Poststructuralism provides a coherent perspective through which feminist principles can be considered in relation to the existing social order.

The focus of this paper is the ways in which schools construct and maintain stereotyped gender positions for children. Poststructuralist theory contributes to this debate in two important ways. Firstly, it provides a

context to explain why, in political terms, the creation and maintenance of a male-female dualism is seen as an imperative by the existing social order. Secondly, poststructuralist theory offers clear insight into how this order is maintained.

Many feminist researchers (Davies, 1989; Rakow, 1986; Clark, 1990; Walkerdine, 1990) have highlighted how patriarchal society has constructed a male-female dualism as a means to maintaining the power relations which have existed for generations. The practice of construing males and females as opposite, complementary and antithetical is seen as a politically expedient practice with its roots firmly embedded in a society which historically has defined a person's social function by their sex.

Coward (1983) gives a good example of the development of this in terms of patriarchy. She cites how, as a result of the universality of the patriarchal order being challenged by anthropological studies, an alternative explanation of the 'naturalness' of patriarchy was constructed in terms of society's recognition of individual property rights:

> Paternal rights came to be seen as synonymous with individual property rights, presupposing that individual interests can be conflated with genetic interests, that property is masculine because of the assumed natural division of labour between the sexes, and that an essential male psychology seeks power through genetic self-perpetuation (cited by Rakow, 1986).

Poststructuralist feminist theory offers a challenge to the 'naturalism' of any discourse which sees human subjectivity as fixed, either in historical, political or personal terms. It is a difficult concept and one which can be understood more easily if we consider the nature of language and its role in the construction of social and cultural 'norms', including gender. Weedon (1987) comments:

> Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organisation and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of selves, our subjectivity is *constructed*. The assumption that subjectivity is constructed implies that it is not innate, but socially produced. Subjectivity is produced in a whole range of discursive

> practices - economic, social and political - the meanings of which are a constant site of struggle over power. Language is not the expression of unique individuality; it constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific (p. 2).

Consider for example the language of the traditional discourse on sex-socialisation theory. Rakow (1986) highlights how theorists, and indeed society in general, discuss gender/sex in terms of 'roles', the implication being that it is a pre-determined function. From a feminist perspective, however, the term 'role' masks questions of power because gender is a pervasive identity which affects other social roles one might choose or be restricted from. Rakow points out that it has been argued that 'caste' is a more appropriate term because ' role flattens and homogenises meaning and evaluation of those experiences, as well as depoliticise' them whereas 'caste' 'calls attention to the power relations'. (p.15) As Davies (1989) points out, language is a necessary tool for survival in the social world but it also provides the tools with which the social structure is created and maintained. This concept is central to poststructuralist theory. A structural linguist, Le Saussure, (cited by Weedon 1987) contributed this founding proposition of poststructuralism, that language does not reflect social reality, but rather constructs it. The feminist poststructuralists have moved even beyond this.

Feminist poststructuralism embraces Saussure's proposition that meaning is produced within language and that the individual sign (eg., the sign 'woman') does not have intrinsic meaning but acquires meaning through its relation to other signs. Poststructuralist feminism however extends this idea of an abstract relational system of language and embeds it firmly in a context of existing historical discourses. As Weedon (1987) comments:

> Once language is understood in terms of competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning to the world, which implies differences in the organisation of social power, then language becomes an important sight of political struggle (p.24).

This concept of discourse is fundamental to feminist poststructuralism. As Weedon (p. 40) points out feminist poststructuralism sees discourse as 'a structuring principle of society, in social institutions, modes of thought and individual subjectivities.' She makes clear how the notion of multiple discourses challenges any notions of language as being a site of fixed meaning, or as existing prior to articulation. In this context, language does not transparently label the real world rather, meaning is 'always socially and historically located in discourses'. Feminist postructuralist theory is thus able ' in detailed, historically specific analysis, to explain the working of power on behalf of specific interests and to analyse the opportunities for resistance' (p.41).

Spender (1980) in *Man Made Language* is even more pointed in her assessment of how the system works. Spender maintains that our language is based on patriarchal symbols and metaphors, the power of which should not be underestimated, in creating and sustaining stereotyped gender positions for women. Spender believes men have been in the position to create the structure (the language) and to define the relationship between men and women with symbols which fit and explain <u>their</u> experiences - primarily those of male superiority. It is a 'chicken and egg' concept - ie. men have the privilege, through a patriarchal system, to create the language, the symbol system, and this language maintains their privilege.

This notion of metaphors and analogies creating, rather than describing, reality is an important one which has been explored extensively by educational researchers. Inbar (1991), in her work on teacher development, maintains that the language we choose to communicate with, the metaphors and the analogies, provide a linguistic mirror whereby communication of shared symbols creates intent. Inbar asserts that the choice of metaphors may in fact be far more significant in terms of creating reality rather than describing it (p.23). In other words, whether metaphors

are approached as a way of 'seeing' or as a way of thinking about situations, they reflect how situations and processes are perceived and as such, they mirror what people *think* reality is, and also shape actual behaviour.

Other researchers into teachers' thinking (Egan, 1986; Elbaz, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 1991) have also commented on the power of language to actually construct reality. It is an important concept for those interested in making explicit the processes at work in the social construction of gender; because, in as much as we think with our language and its metaphors and images, it will be very difficult to change reality without changing the discourse.

The principles of feminist poststructuralism, however, provide an even more fundamental challenge. While language is the theory's core principle of change, the concept of subjectivity ('personhood') radically redefines the existing social order. Feminist poststructuralism challenges the assumption of traditional theories that a person, either actively or passively, assumes an identity which is rational, not contradictory and fixed. Poststructuralist theory 'sees human subjects as not fixed but constantly in process, being constituted and reconstituted through the discursive practices they have access to in their daily lives' (Davies,p. 11, 1993). It is a theory which questions the notion that people are primarily rational beings, controlling their own action and desire. It suggests that desire can be created by discourse, a concept quite foreign to the liberal humanist discourse, which sees people as autonomous thinkers, whose desires spring from their own needs, their own sense of self. Poststructuralism seeks to understand the structures, the processes and the discourses which position women into fixed states of 'personhood'; positions in which women are defined and define themselves, as unchanging and unitary beings. Poststructuralist theory questions how women come to believe such a fixed subjectification.

Davies (1993) clarifies succinctly a poststructuralist's view of the process of subjectification:

> Poststructuralist theory argues that people are not socialised into the social world, but that they go through a process of *subjectification*. In socialisation theory, the focus is on the process of shaping the individual that is undertaken by others. In poststructuralist theory the focus is on the way each person actively takes up the discourses through which they and others speak/write the world into existence *as if they were their own* (p. 13).

To develop this new understanding of gender a new discourse, which does not inherently position men and women as opposite and antithetical, as superior and inferior, is beginning to emerge. New metaphors and stories which describe the multiple positions open to women and men in society are being developed and the current understanding of 'personhood' revised to include the notion of change and contradiction.

Changes such as these are subtle and difficult to implement within existing discourses. Perhaps the most pervasive of the traditional discourses is that of the social-learning theorists and ostensibly it could hold the greatest potential for an inclusion of feminist principles. With its emphasis on the power of imitation, modelling and reinforcement there is clear potential to consider the type of models children have and the language used to describe gender positions.

There are, however, significant problems with a simplistic view of just changing the terminology. As Davies (1988) points out, to provide these alternative models gender differences must first be highlighted. The difficulty with this approach is that any emphasis on gender difference can actually serve to reinforce the conservative view that different treatment of males and females is an essential part of the social order (p.4). A good example of this in practice is the recent pressure from feminists to see women portrayed more 'realistically' in the media. Implicit in such an attempt, however, is the inference that the media is actually a mirror of social

reality, rather than a constructor of it. Secondly, any attempt to portray women realistically has as its stumbling block the implication that it is possible to portray 'women' as a generic category, that the multiple and shifting representations of a diverse group of people could be conflated into a finite series of images. Essentially what happens is that the attempt to redefine the social construction of women only serves to confirm the existing structure.

The difficulty with social learning theory and cognitive development theory is that they both assume that men and women are behaviourally and psychologically different, and the causes of those differences can be found in developmental processes. Feminist researchers (Weedon, 1987; Davies 1988, 1993),would argue that even the biological differences are subject to a great deal of social construction, and it is the perception of difference which creates that difference. Feminist theorists assert that biological, psychological and social differences do not lead to our seeing two genders but rather that our seeing of two genders leads to the 'discovery' of biological, psychological and social differences. It is further argued that this conceptualisation of gender as a universal, biological category obscures class and other social differences as the real reason for division between the sexes. In a feminist discourse, contrary to both popular and scientific assumptions, sex and gender are both usefully seen as cultural, mutable, socially constructed categories. But as Davies (1989) points out, the proposition that 'males' and 'females' are created categories will not win universal acceptance because our existing patriarchal order has too much to gain from maintaining the dualism:

> The male-female dualism is an *idea* with material force through which males are allocated positions in which they can act as if they are powerful. They thus become powerful both through developing a subjectivity which is organised around power and through the discursive practices which establish male power as real and legitimate. Females are allocated positions of weakness, complementary to and supportive of that power. To the extent

> that the dualism is taken to be true, it is true. It is taken to be true in large part because it is understood as given, despite the vast amount of moment-by-moment work that visibly goes into its achievement (p.109).

Perhaps Rakow (1986) gives us a useful starting point in this reconceptualization process. She provides an interesting proposition that 'gender' should actually be seen as a verb that signifies the process by which society constructs and maintains a particular gender system. Rakow comments:

> Gender is both something we do and something we think with, both a set of social practices and a system of cultural meanings. The social practices - 'the doing of gender' - and the cultural meanings - 'thinking the world using the categories and experiences of gender' - constitute us as men and women, organised into a particular configuration of social relations (p.12).

If 'gender' does become a term used to signify a dynamic meaning system, a way of organising categories to make sense of the world and experience, then perhaps this will be the first step, the thin edge of the wedge in changing our current language usage and hence in creating new understandings of gender. I believe that the site of this struggle for this change will have to be our most powerful social institutions. Weedon (1987) in *Feminist Practice and Post-structuralist Theory* begins her work with the assertion that "while schooling is an important site for the reproduction of gender relations, it is also the site for intervention and change". It is this challenge which is considered in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

GENDER CONSTRUCTION AND SCHOOLS

The examination of the different theories that underpin much of the current thinking about gender reveals that it is by no means clear how gender socialisation and differentiation occur. Certainly the process is more complex and contradictory than some of the theories (eg Piagetian cognitive development theory or social learning theory) would suggest. It seems clear that to understand the role schools play in constructing gendered subjectivities in children, a more subtle and complex understanding of schools as dynamic living communities, anchored in specific cultural and historic contexts, must be developed.

As discussed in the introduction, it is proposed that an exploration of such issues is best undertaken within a poststructuralist discourse. Reinharz (1992) comments that '(poststructural) research creates the opportunity to put texts and people in contexts, thus providing a richer and more accurate interpretation' (p.212). And indeed, in exploring what happens in schools, I see it as both counter-productive and contrived to ignore the fact that I am part of a real school community.

I note Patti Lather's comment (1991) that to write poststructurally is to paradoxically be aware of one's own complicity in that which one critiques:

> Such a movement of reflexivity and historicity at once inscribes and subverts. Provisionality and undecidability, partisanship and overt politics, replace poses of objectivity and disinterestedness (p.10).

Thus while maintaining some traditional textual practice, such as the use of references to a variety of research studies, I have consciously inserted myself into the discourse. The voices of other teachers and of parents are also directly accessed. It is a discourse which seeks to decentre the author, to

reveal herself as created by the discourse of others and thus to become multi-voiced rather than proposing a singular authoritative voice.

Further, by inserting myself and those I work with into the writing as real people, I seek to challenge simplistic discourses which separate biological, social, psychological and cultural factors. Instead, I propose, through the recreation of teacher voices and their contexts, to make explicit the complex cultural processes and social structures which are part of schools and which are integral to the maintenance of the male-female duality.

In this chapter the power relationships which exist in schools will be highlighted, as will the policies and classroom practices which support them. The attitudes of teachers will be considered in relation to the traditional pedagogic discourses which have guided both their beliefs and practices. The primary school curriculum will also be looked at briefly by specifically considering one core element of that curriculum, the teaching of reading. Reading instruction was chosen as it provides an interesting example of how gendered practices have become the new orthodoxy in one element of teaching.

Power and Politics

Schools are bureaucratic communities dominated by power relations. The most fundamental of these is that between the adults and children, but they also include a whole network of relationships between parents and teachers, teachers and senior staff, children and other children. Many of the schools and classroom organisational structures are set up around these power relationships and a close examination reveals that much of the power is gender based. Some feminist writers (Spender, 1980; Wolf, 1990; Greer, 1985) see the whole of these relationships as operating within the confines of an overarching system of patriarchy, of male domination; but other writers

find the concept of patriarchy does not sufficiently describe the relationships which operate in schools. Connell's view of patriarchy (1987, in Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p.9,10) is useful in understanding how power actually operates in schools. His concept of a 'gender order' is an important one as it implies historical and cultural construction of relationships between men and women that a simplistic view of patriarchy does not. Connell's 'gender order' proposes that gender relations are structured around three key issues: the division of labour, the power relations between women and men, and sexuality, each of which operates dynamically within the social context. Within the context of a school each of these is relevant and will be given some consideration in this paper. Gilbert & Taylor (1991) make the point that Connell's concept of 'gender order' does not explicate the oppressive notion of patriarchy and hence they prefer the term 'patriarchal gender order'; but they do concede that Connell's is a useful framework within which to consider the gendered practices that are the fabric of life in institutions such as schools.

Policies

The Commonwealth Schools Commission's report *Girls, Schools and Society* which was issued in 1975 could reasonably be seen as the first major analysis of the education of girls in the Australian school system. Since then numerous reports at State and Federal level have highlighted the inequities in educational opportunity which exist in Australian schools and have made recommendations to redress these. Poole (1990) summarises the focus of these reports as primarily concerned with - the different participation rates in education and training of female and male students; enrolment patterns into different subject areas of females and males; the attitude of girls towards schooling; sexism in curricular materials; classroom dynamics; and the organisation of schooling.

As the focus of this paper is early childhood education, it is the last three points which will be considered in some detail. The first two are not seen as relevant to early education and I believe the question of attitudes to school is not a particularly significant one at early childhood level. My own experience and that of many teacher-researchers (Butterworth, 1991; Maccoby, 1988; Gilbert, 1991) has been that young children, and young girls in particular, are generally very positive about school, enthusiastic and eager to learn. For most teachers this is a source of great delight, but accompanied by a genuine concern about what happens to girls' enthusiasm and performance levels as they move up through the school system. Why do girls who begin school so well equipped to learn and to grow, seem to become progressively less interested, more passive and, indeed to achieve less physically and academically? (Yates, 1993)

School and Classroom Organisation

It is important to acknowledge some improvements have occurred in recent years. The publication eighteen years ago of *Girls, School and Society,* (1975) and the subsequent reports this document instigated, raised awareness of the inequitable educational outcomes for girls in Australian schools and there is now wide acceptance in the educational and political community that a problem exists. I am not quite so confident to include the 'general' community in this acceptance. The problem of equal opportunity in schools has now been defined, analysed and explained extensively. Unfortunately few measurable improvements to girls' relatively disadvantaged position at the end of their education have become apparent. The focus of many of these reports has been on the organisational structures in schools and classrooms which serve to maintain an unnecessary male-female dualism along very stereotyped lines. Many schools now have policies which discourage classroom practices that differentiate in an

arbitrary way between girls and boys, such as lining up, calling the register, allocating playground space or equipment, etc. These are small gains and should not be ignored. Unfortunately these constitute only the very tip of a large iceberg and it is with regret that it must be noted that many schools have not even taken these small steps. Tasmanian schools still have pink record cards for girls and blue for boys and many schools have uniforms for girls which are totally inappropriate for active play. A conversation with a fellow principal about how he solved the problem of boys making sexually suggestive remarks to girls on the monkey bars reveals clearly that many of the power relations in schools are invisible to those in power. The problem in this instance was seen as solved by banning girls from playing on the monkey bars!

The experience of this writer is that even small changes are difficult to implement and require a good deal of maintenance. For example, because children often segregate themselves in classrooms, strictly along gendered lines, it requires explicit teacher intervention to prevent this. Clearly, busy teachers will not seek extra tasks but also as Clark (1990) comments, attempts at non sex segregation often backfire because they often unwittingly cast the girls as the problem. An example of this became clear to me in my own classroom. Each day as my kindergarten class came in from outside play, I would rush to beat the children inside so I could direct them to sit at mixed gender tables for morning tea. I had often felt like a military supervisor on these occasions and came to question why I was doing this. Recently one little girl, in total frustration, asked me '*Why do you always tell us what to do?*' My reply in the hurly burly of the moment I am afraid really was dreadful - I resorted to the inevitable power position - *'Because I'm the teacher'(!!).* The problem is that I am not so sure I had any other really satisfactory answer. I thought of myself as trying to prevent gender-based power cliques from developing, but on reflection I believe it is more to maintain order than

anything else. The boys tend to talk loudly, spit their drinks and fight over the fruit whereas the girls generally prefer to chat quietly with other girls and to take their time over the fruit. Sitting with the boys means the girls have to talk loudly if they wish to be heard, and eat quickly if they wish to have their share of food. Hardly an equitable situation!

Clearly there are some fundamental questions which could be asked about the classroom dynamics, about my own attitude and how this has developed.

Classroom Dynamics - Teacher Attitudes

There has been extensive research into classroom dynamics, in terms of the teacher-child relationships. As early as 1966 a study by Sears and Feldman (in Ramsay, 1982) discovered that, at primary school level, teachers interacted more with boys than girls in four main categories of teaching behaviour; approval, instruction, listening to the student and disapproval. Since 1966 numerous studies have described and analysed the extent to which teachers' interactions differ between girls and boys. Spender's work *Invisible Women: The Schooling Scandal* (1982) as well as her numerous other research studies done in British and Australian schools, has been particularly influential in highlighting this phenomenon. Spender found that at least two thirds of the teachers' interactions were with boys. What was more worrying was that when teachers attempted to redress this imbalance, girls were embarrassed and upset by what appeared to be 'unnatural attention' and the boys became increasingly disruptive, claiming they were being neglected. Even more alarming is that in attempts to alter the balance of interactions, the most teachers ever achieved was 60/40 in favour of the boys!

When considering Spender's research I am reminded of Davies' (1988) concept of an incorrigible proposition. Is this why it feels so natural that boys should receive more attention? Spender (1982) and other researchers

(Stanworth, 1981; Clark, 1990; Davies, 1988; Ebbeck, 1985) have highlighted a number of other important differences in the *quality*, as well as quantity, of interactions teachers have with boys and girls. Boys were found to be engaged in more argumentative, challenging talk with the teacher, while girls tended to talk quietly to each other. Boys were twice as likely to be asked questions, to be regarded as conscientious while they were three times as likely to be praised. One of the natural consequences of this is that teachers knew a great deal more about the boys in their class. Further, Spender found that in British classrooms most teachers openly acknowledged that they geared their teaching towards the interests and needs of the boys. Whether this was so because, as some research suggests (Clark, 1990; Davies, 1989), the boys are more disruptive so it is in the teacher's interest to keep them motivated and thus under control, or whether it is just that the teacher knows the boys better, the results for the girls are irregardlessly the same. Girls are marginalised in their own classrooms, they come to see as natural that school is often geared around boys' interests and needs.

Much of this research was conducted in secondary schools or with older primary students and I was interested to see if these findings would apply to very young children, particularly pre-schoolers.

Ebbeck (1985) observed pre-school teachers' interactions with boys as compared with girls and found that her results concurred very closely with Spender's. Sixty per cent of the 2183 teacher interactions observed were with boys and forty per cent with girls. These comments by a parent of one of the children in my own class powerfully highlights what happens in practice:

> *As a mother's help, I was intrigued by how noticeable it is that boys seem to almost naturally demand more teacher time/attention than do girls, as a consequence of their physical behaviour. When the morning roll was being completed, various boys were wriggling and day dreaming. This necessitated a repeat performance with a few names; the girls were all*

> *concentrating and thus were passed by with rapidity, despite, I feel sure the best intentions on the part of the staff! Is it a case of boys shall be boys?*
> (Parent survey, April)

Bruce (1985) in her paper *The Implications of Sex-role Stereotyping in the first years of School*, discusses research undertaken in South Australian kindergartens which found that girls learn early to wait until they are asked rather than to initiate, and also to remain silent rather than offer opinions which differ from others. The teacher researchers in this study identified that the girls were less likely to take risks and conducted an investigation to analyse their interactions with the girls. A consideration of the questions they asked students revealed that the questions teachers asked girls were more likely to require closed, yes/no responses than the open-ended questions they asked the boys. What was also alarming was that teachers noticed that if a girl did not know an answer they were more likely to reassure her and move on to somebody else, but if a boy did not know, they were likely to lead him into an exploratory conversation to find the answer. These teachers could not account for their behaviour but it does link closely to Clark's findings (1990) that teachers enjoyed teaching boys more than girls because they were perceived as brighter and more challenging.

But where have these beliefs come from, what has led teachers to see as 'natural' this inequitable treatment of girls? The answer to this goes to the very core of early childhood teachers' most sacred belief the 'child-centred' tradition.

Child-centred Teaching: The Sacred Cow of Early Childhood Education

It is a considerable irony that an educational tradition (see Bee, 1985; Biber, 1984; Lambert & Clyde et al, 1987) which has as a core tenet the importance of individual rights, should serve to discriminate so profoundly against half the population. While not wishing to look in great detail at the evolution of the 'child-centred' tradition, it is important to acknowledge that

it has been the orthodoxy of early childhood education even before a view of liberal humanism permeated modern education in general. For almost four hundred years early childhood educators have espoused the idea that the child needs to learn in an atmosphere that nurtures the child's right and ability to choose for her/himself, to be an autonomous learner. In modern times when primary and secondary schools were still very much in the 'chalk and talk' mode, essentially following the didactic Platonic tradition, early childhood educators were staunchly defending the child's self-initiated 'natural' play, as essential to learning. Many of the core beliefs of early childhood education can be traced back to the teachings of Comenius, a 17th century Moravian bishop, the ideas expressed in his work *The School of Infancy* (translation, 1858) are as much foundational principles for infant teachers today as they were in the 17th century:

> Boys ever delight in being occupied in something, for their youthful blood does not allow them to be at rest ... Let them be like ants continually occupied in doing something, carrying, drawing, constructing and transposing, provided whatever they do, be done prudently. In as much as infants try to imitate what they see others do, they should be permitted to have all things ... In a word whatever children delight to play with ... they ought to be gratified rather than restrained (p.39,40).

Except for the fact that girls are not mentioned explicitly (and for many teachers this would go unnoticed) the essential tenets - activity, imitation, freedom, choice are all there and remain so, in a pedagogy which few teachers would reject.

I have taken this short historical tangent because I believe it is only in understanding how entrenched, in historical terms, some views are that we can really appreciate how profound any challenge to these is for an early childhood teacher. Not only are these beliefs part of a long tradition, but it is a view which, until comparatively recently, was at odds with the practices which dominated the rest of the education system. Infant teachers were considered a breed apart - and they were intensely proud of it! Teacher

feminists will have a difficult time convincing traditional infant teachers that perhaps everything is not so innocent nor so neutral in the world of the modern classroom.

It will not be easy but I believe the research which has been undertaken in the last 15 years, by a range of educators, cannot and should not be ignored.

Individuality and Choice : The Myth of Equality

MacNaughton (1992) in her paper *Equity Challenges for the Early Childhood Curriculum* goes to the heart of the matter when she challenges the basic assumption made by early childhood educators, that a crucial determinant of the curriculum should be its reference to child development. MacNaughton argues that it is this reliance on developmental psychology's traditional categories of child development that makes it so difficult for gender equity to work in kindergartens '... because the assumptions it does and does not make about gender directly influences the way educators learn to see or not see gender when they are observing children.' (p.228). MacNaughton further asserts:

> The tendency for educators to not see gender as an all-pervasive way of being is reinforced by the way developmental psychology also privileges a focus on the individual (Miles 1988). Individual needs and individual development are prioritised at the expense of a focus on social and particularly power dynamics between children (Walkerdine, 1981, 1989, p.213).

MacNaughton's findings are based on research which involved four hundred children in Victorian kindergartens and child care centres and are supported by the work of other researchers such as Clark. In her work, *The Great Divide* (1990), Clark also challenges the sacred tenet among early childhood teachers that teaching programs, based on catering for individual differences, are inherently equitable. Clark maintains that most teachers believe children should be treated equally and, because of their implicit

belief in the 'natural difference' model, teachers actually see it as ideologically unsound not to differentiate the teaching program along gendered lines. In other words, if boys present with greater needs than girls, then these should be met by their teacher. Clark asserts that this orthodoxy of individuality actually obscures the practices which promote highly gendered attitudes and behaviours in primary classrooms:

> This happens because instead of maintaining that there are just two categories of predetermined types of people it can suggest an endless variety of unique individuals. However although they are endless in variety they are still seen as predetermined. Sometimes the differences between the two beliefs is indistinguishable as teachers slide from 'boys will be boys' to 'Jeffrey will be Jeffrey'.
> (p.13)

The orthodoxy of individualism is a powerful proposition which is often invoked by those opposed to gender equity or affirmative action programs in schools. It is a palatable argument, both politically and philosophically, to maintain that affirmative action should not be taken along gendered lines but instead that programs should be differentiated to meet individual needs. In reality this usually means there is no change to the status quo and thus to the outcomes for girls as has been made clear in documents such as *The National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-1997.* As was suggested earlier, this is particularly evident in early childhood education. For example in a recent document *A Stitch in Time: Strengthening the First Years of School* (1992) which was commissioned by the Schools Council and Australian Early Childhood Association to re-examine the important issues surrounding the effective teaching of young children in schools, it is significant that only four paragraphs of a fifty page document are devoted to 'gender bias' (p.11). The only research cited which considers the practical implications of implementing programs is one by Derman-Sparks (1989) which argues that teachers should design programs so that all children have a strong sense of identity without feeling superior to those who are different. Derman-Sparks recommends a process of contextual

curriculum planning in which teachers' values are considered in the light of the impact these have on children from other classes, cultures, races, their gender and whether they have disabilities, in order to create a curriculum which is genuinely anti bias. This approach is commended by the Schools Council because it puts all the 'isms' together in a way which 'is quite different from the existing programs on gender equity in Australian Schools' (p.11).

The endorsement of such an approach could however be seen as nothing more than a politically expedient way of ensuring that recommended programs are consistent with social justice policy, but with a marked unwillingness to analyse the deeper issues or to acknowledge that for genuine equal opportunity to occur, it is sometimes necessary to take affirmative action. It is not suggested that an anti-bias curriculum model is in theory inappropriate, but I believe that in terms of redressing gender inequities, it is no more than a Utopian dream unless attention is given to the ways in which children become embedded in a particular gender position.

The Constraints of Choice

A child's right, and indeed need, to have a choice about what and how she learns is another sacred cow of education which Clark (1990) challenges. She asserts that this notion of free choice in classrooms assumes that people do not have different histories or different constraints which must inherently limit their ability to choose. Clark maintains that what underpins this practice is the belief that children are unique individuals, with different interests, abilities and learning styles and this should be acknowledged in how teachers organise the learning program. Clark asserts that in reality this can mean teachers evade their obligations to make constraints on moral or educational grounds. 'When explicit constraints are removed, implicit constraints, in particular those related to ideas about appropriate masculinity

and femininity and constraints related to power differences, become more influential' (p.16). MacNaughton's work (1992) with a number of teachers in the Gender Equity Research Group, found that children do indeed make stereotyped choices in the selection of play, play themes, play materials, etc., but MacNaughton argues that why this is so should not dominate teacher thinking but instead, teachers should question whether this is desirable. MacNaughton comments 'Children will continue to make these choices unless there is clear intervention to change it' (p.235). And indeed in the kindergarten this orthodoxy of choice actually means that children's learning experiences are constrained significantly along strictly gendered lines.

Ebbeck's study (1985) of thirty kindergartens showed serious imbalances in the participation of girls in block play, sand play, climbing and construction. As Ebbeck notes, all of these curriculum areas offer opportunities for development of mathematical, scientific and spatial skills; and these results offer a bleak outlook for access to a balanced curriculum in later schooling, if under-participation begins at four years old. The salient point here is that, regardless of why it is that girls do not participate in some activities, the dominant informal mode of kindergarten teaching based on free choice is disadvantaging all children. Any system which allows girls to avoid crucial early experiences in maths, science and spatial skills, or boys to avoid the dramatic play area where important opportunities for expressive language and elaborated thinking occurs, must be seen at the very least inefficient, or at worst, woefully ineffective.

Askew and Ross (1988) supported Ebbeck's findings and found that this pattern of boys dominating particular spaces continues outside in the playground as well as inside the classroom. These researchers found that boys appear to have a greater need than girls to identify certain activities as male or female, and as a consequence, assumed dominance over activities identified as 'male' and avoided activities identified as 'female'. But, as has

been highlighted by Ebbeck's research, assumptions or definitions of what type of knowledge, activity or behaviour belongs to whom, has direct implications for what children learn. And surely that is what teaching is all about. The powerful pedagogy of choice and individualism appears, in this instance, to actually obscure the heart of a teacher's professional responsibility, which is to ensure children have access to a balance of learning experiences.

Power Relations in the Kindergarten

At the heart of all of this is the question of power. As MacNaughton comments 'Power is the ability to make others do things that are to your benefit'. Teachers would claim that their professional power allows them to promote a child's autonomy of thought and action but Walkerdine (1990) sees this orthodoxy of individualism and choice as a denial of the real power relations which exist in classrooms. The rise of individualism and the child centred tradition is seen by Walkerdine as signalling the rise of oppression for women in the classroom, for both the teachers and the girl students. Walkerdine sees the teacher as made passive by the child's self-determining activity. She believes the discourse of naturalism has made invisible the power relations between the children and has made it 'natural' that boys dominate both teacher time and classroom space. And indeed, Walkerdine's view is representative of most feminist poststructural analysis. MacNaughton (in print) comments

> Feminist postructuralists, along with other poststructuralists, assert that power is a central dynamic of our social world (Weedon 1987). Power resides in all relationships and is expressed in all discourses. Therefore the social world cannot be understood without understanding the operation of power in discourses, and specifically how discourses privilege particular interests within particular societies at specific points in history..... a key feminist poststructuralist task is to explore and expose the gendered effects

> of the operation of power in all relationships in a given society through analysing discourse (language and practices) (p.1, 2).

MacNaughton's own work (1992 & In print 1993) confirms that the free play in kindergartens should not be seen as innocently facilitating development. Her research group found that much of the play was power-based ie., that it centred around an ongoing battle about who would control and lead the play. Indeed the play was often conflict-ridden and problematic, with gender being one of the primary categories used by children to exclude others from the play. For girls, free play often meant learning how to avoid conflict with boys and that, while girls' special spaces, like home corner, might be contested by boys, domestic play narratives were generally the main ones which girls could access and share. For boys, free play often involved using physical power to expand and maintain boy spaces and to interrupt girl spaces. Boys also learned to use macho, adventure-based narratives in their play. Further, the research group found that life for children who crossed these traditional play boundaries often meant isolation or constant struggle to be included (MacNaughton, 1992, p.233, 234).

Even more concerning is the notion that this discourse of naturalism has rendered women teachers, in their assigned role as nurturers, or even benevolent dictators, as powerless against male oppression. Many researchers (Walkerdine, 1990; Clark, 1990; Davies, 1989) have highlighted the extent to which aggression in the classroom is down-played into reasoned argument. Pre-school teachers are particularly good at this. If you believe profoundly in the innocence and neutrality of discourse then of course you can ignore anything. Walkerdine's Miss Baxter example (1990, p.5), where the teacher chooses to ignore outrageously explicit sexual references directed at her by two pre-school boys, is a powerful example of how a particular pedagogical discourse renders invisible the alternative discourses which children often choose to access. In this example, four year

old boys were able to ignore a discourse which rendered them powerless, that is the teacher/child discourse, and replace it with a discourse where the teacher signified not as a teacher, but as a woman. As Walkerdine points out, boys have access to control through a language which implicitly positions men as dominant and hence the boys access that power by refusing to be constituted by a teacher/child discourse, which renders them powerless. Instead they take control away from the teacher by constituting her as the powerless object of their sexist discourse. And indeed the teacher chooses to ignore this as she is confident that the behaviour is 'natural' and just an individual response. Clark (1990) comments that this type of behaviour is rarely seen as sexual harassment because the only explicit discourse in schools is the one where all adults are seen as inherently powerful, in relation to children. And indeed, as Clark points out, to acknowledge that boys are learning to use sexuality as a way of exerting power would threaten very deeply held beliefs about children being asexual and innocent (p.22).

The issue is made even more complex when considering how schools are structured around male models of authority. Women teachers who cannot invoke these authoritarian practices are seen as professionally inadequate. In secondary schools the problem is more obvious because of the physical size of the children and the overt sexuality of adolescence. Askew and Ross (1988) comment:

> 'Women often have difficulty in asserting authority because of not being taken seriously as women. This extends to the attitude that it is the woman's own fault if she has been sexually harassed in some way - it is a sign of her incompetence as a teacher' (p. 67).

Clearly it would be even more embarrassing for an adult woman to admit that a four year old sexually harassed her. So, as Clark points out, they don't. Each incident is individualised and the sexual nature of the behaviour is rendered invisible, the children are left alone and the teachers

continue to reproduce a discourse which promotes the naturalness and harmlessness of their behaviour.

The power relationships between children and teachers may be more problematic than they first appear but there is no such ambiguity in the power position which is that of the principal. Despite the gains women have made in terms of equal opportunity in pay, conditions and promotions, it remains that women are vastly under-represented in the educational hierarchy. Poole (1990, p.119) comments that since the enactment of equal opportunity legislation in a number of states the proportion of female principals has actually decreased. When we consider the evidence that children acquire fairly rigid sex stereotypes of adult roles and occupations by age five or six (Garret, 1977; Ein & Tremaine, 1977; Maccoby, 1980 - in Smith & Grimwood, 1983) there must be some cause for concern. Smith and Grimwood's own research in New Zealand showed clearly that children in their second year of school had acquired sex stereotyped concepts of the role of the principal (male) and early childhood teachers (female). My own experience as a female principal in a small infant school (kinder, prep, grade 1, 2) has confirmed that the children do hold these stereotyped views - even when the reality contradicts it. My conversation with six year old Sean highlights this. This conversation took place about six months after I came to the school:

Sean: *Are you the headmaster Mrs Mawson?*

B.M.: *I am the principal Sean.*

Sean: *Is that the same as a headmaster?*

B.M.: *Yes.*

Sean: *Does it mean you're the boss?*

B.M.: *Mm.*

Sean: *Of all the teachers, and Mr Clark (male groundsman/cleaner) as well as the kids?*

B.M.: *Yes.*

Sean: *I don't reckon you can be (long pause) my dad reckons you look too young anyway.*

B.M.: *Well, Sean I am the principal, I really like being here, I like my job.*

Clearly Sean had already a well established concept of what a principal should be - male, powerful and old! It was obviously problematic for him that I did not meet these criteria and so this prompted him to question his father on this matter. His father really just confirmed his suspicions that all was not right at his school!

As Davies (1989) comments:

> Much of the adult world is not consciously taught to children, is not contained in the content of their talk, but it is embedded in the language, the discursive practices and the social and narrative structures through which the child is constituted as a person, as a child, and as male or female (p.4).

Poole (1990, p.120) also comments, that if education departments are serious about providing students in schools with positive female role models, an active recruitment campaign is necessary to attract women to leadership roles.

But the principal's role is far more critical than just providing good role models. The most important factor identified by teachers as affecting the success of gender equity programs is the support of principals. As Clark (1990) notes 'principals are important in any change program, but particularly at the point when the change is initiated and when reaction to change occurs' (p.104). There is still considerable resistance to change among teachers (and children) and, whether we like it or not, power relations will always be a deciding factor towards implementation. The power exercised may actually be a responsible reaction to an inequitable situation, but nevertheless it remains that such inequities often cannot be tackled with reasonable discussion only, but often the mandate of power is also required.

Curriculum and the Doctrine of Naturalism

Clearly teacher attitudes play an important part in the creation of gendered subjectivities in children but school structures, and particularly the curriculum, are also critical to this process. A consideration of the impact of curricula on the gendered positioning of children is more appropriately the subject of a detailed study in its own right, however, it is important to acknowledge that curricula has developed in conjunction with teacher attitudes.

The orthodoxy of naturalism has permeated curriculum most powerfully, and has ordered and defined teacher practices. The core of the learning program in early childhood classes is its reading and language development program and here more than in any other curriculum area 'naturalism' has become a guiding principle. Feminist teachers and researchers in recent times have come to question both the curriculum materials used, the texts as well as the teaching practice that are mandated as appropriate. There is a large body of research which has looked at the kind of texts children are exposed to in terms of gender stereotypes and implicit ideology. Davies (1988), in an extensive review of the research into children's literature (she cites 13 studies), found that the overwhelming majority of stories and texts used in the early years are still sexist:

> The prevailing images presented to the children in infant schools are more restricted than in the world outside the school ... the predominant forms of discourse in schools serve not only to enhance the images of men at the expense of women, but frequently present a distorted picture of the world, one which is far more sexist than the real world (p.21).

Similar conclusions were drawn by Barrett (1980, p.108) after her review of the research and she wryly comments that there really seems to be quite a deal of hard work being put into the maintenance of these images - perhaps as 'the wish fulfilment of the patriarchy.' Barrett's analysis of the creation of compensatory images which attempt to elevate the 'moral value' of

femininity is also worth considering. She contends that it is society's most fundamental structures which deny opportunities for women, and then 'attempt to "compensate" for this by creating a corresponding ideology of moral worth' (p.109). I believe there is an interesting parallel to be drawn with the images of women in fairytales - the wicked, ugly witch image which is so representative of evil in these stories that it is compensated for by the beautiful, young and passive princess.

Barrett makes the point that an important element of such compensatory work is the romanticism of women it generates. Women are good and virtuous and, as Davies (1989) points out, if a woman is active and powerful it is only acceptable if her agency is directed in a selfless way to a man or a child.

However, as Walkerdine (1990) comments, simple analysis of the content of stories is of limited value. She believes that rather than assuming a rationalist stance, educators need to analyse the ways in which stories operate in terms of how children position themselves and are positioned. Davies (1988) comments:

> Feminist analyses of stories, then needs to pay attention not only to the content, but also to the metaphors, the forms of relationship, the patterns of power and desire that are created in the text. How the child relates to the text, inserts her or himself into the text, and thus how she or he interprets and uses the text are also critical issues for a feminist reading of texts (p. 45).

What Davies is saying seems to be supported by a number of other researchers. Freebody, Luke and Gilbert (1991) considered the sociological and linguistic research (Baker, 1991; Baker and Freebody, 1989; Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Heap, 1991; Street, 1984 cited by ibid) and concluded that reading is most appropriately seen as a variable social practice which is interactively constructed. There is also a growing number of feminist writers and educators (Gilbert, 1991, 1991b; Walkerdine, 1990; Moss, 1989) who believe that reading practices and positions are selected and enacted along

very narrow socially-constructed lines and that, as Freebody et al have pointed out, the 'discourses of schooling embody a systematic selecting and valorising of particular practices and an equally systematic excluding of others' (p.4-5).

What is being suggested is that while it may have been recognised in recent times how ideologically unsound the content of some texts are, ie. based more on hegemonic power relations, and maintaining these, than on literary merit, it has not been as widely accepted that children are also taught an equally selective tradition of reading practices, ie. how to do things with the text and position oneself as reader. Janice Radway (1983) sums up the complexity of the process of making literary meaning:

> Literary meaning is the result of a complex, temporally evolving interaction between a fixed verbal structure and a socially situated reader. The reader makes sense of the verbal structure by referring to previously learned aesthetic and cultural codes (p. 55).

Radway refers to what she calls 'interpretative communities' which she believes are responsible for both the shape of the reader's activities and for the texts those activities produce. In other words, if educators seek to influence the 'readings' which students have of various cultural texts, then our classrooms must become the kind of interpretative communities which allow for a variety of readings to occur.

How then can this occur? Perhaps one of the most important myths which must be debunked first is the notion that learning to read and write is a 'natural' process which occurs in a neutral context, ie. that because the texts and methods used to teach children to read and write are no longer contrived for this purpose, but rather utilise 'real' books and that natural, personal and individual written and oral responses are encouraged from the children, then this constitutes a neutral environment. Gilbert (1991b, pp.27-40) gives a comprehensive review of these dominant pedagogical discourses which have influenced language and literacy teaching and contends that

their overarching emphasis on the 'natural', personal nature of literacy teaching has served to obscure the socially constructed nature of language practices and effectively stifled any debate on the social and cultural nature of language learning:

> The result has been that a consideration of the way in which language practices contribute towards the construction of gendered identities has been rather noticeably absent from the discussion language. When regarded as the natural ebb and flow of day to day existence, it is too easily regarded as a neutral message system: an almost transparent system through which teachers and students communicate (p.34).

What Gilbert argues here and in other instances (Gilbert, 1991a) is that teachers must direct their attention from this notion of textual unity and stable meanings to the fact that readers must take up particular reading positions in relation to texts if they are to produce conventional cultural meaning. Furthermore, the positions they do take up are dependent on each reader's discursive history. If this is accepted, then it seems clear that teachers must concentrate on giving readers access to a range of discursive knowledge, if they want these readers to have open to them a variety of ways in which they make meaning from texts.

Gilbert introduces the notion of the 'resistant' readers - that is a community of readers who have been given access to other discursive knowledge and reading positions which challenge the dominant ideology of the texts offered:

> ... it is possible to be a *resistant* reader to what has come to pass as the socially conventional 'reading' of a story, if you have access to discourses which challenge the orthodoxy and status of the text in question. It is less possible to be a resistant reader if you see nothing to challenge in the dominant reading position offered: if you cannot denaturalise the apparent naturalness and opacity of the language, or cannot conceive of other ways to write about the issue in question (p.40).

Gilbert's view that teachers must expose the cultural, historical and gender specificity of narratives is an interesting one to consider in the terms of the very significant places stories and storying have had in classrooms in

recent years. During the past 10 years there has been an upsurge of interest in the place of stories, both as a teaching strategy and also as the basis for literacy programs.

Many writers (Holdaway, 1978; Graves, 1983; Egan, 1986) have highlighted the power of the story form in making meanings in our culture. Egan particularly has influenced the nature of primary Social Science programs with his contention that young children have an intrinsic interest in the fantastic and the unknown, and that it is 'natural' for them to think in terms of bi-polar opposites. Egan maintains that young children should not be limited in their learning programs to that which is within their immediate sphere but should, through storying, have access to the 'big' issues which interest them - good/evil, love/hate, life/death etc:

> One of the most obvious structural devices we can see in children's stories is the use of binary opposites. Embedded in the story or embodied by the story are conflicts between good and bad, courage and cowardice, fear and security and so on ... These abstract binary opposites serve as criteria for the selection and organisation of the content of the story and they serve as the main structuring lines along which the story moves (p.27).

And indeed, Davies (1988) would argue that it is these very stories which have as their sub-text sexist and class-based constructions of reality, that are the critical resource through which children learn to position themselves as bi-polar males or females with the appropriate patterns of power and desire (p.47).

But surely teachers need to ask - who is telling the stories about story telling, and are there new stories being constructed which provide narrative structures in which new ways of solving existing conflicts are presented? As Gilbert (1992) points out there seems to be almost no acknowledgment of the fact that storying is a social practice and that it is also inevitably a gendered practice:

> Stories have a functional role in our culture; we live our lives on the power of various stories and it is through stories that we position

> ourselves in relation to others, and are ourselves positioned by the stories of our culture (p.2).

Clearly it is going to take a lot more than merely providing alternative or feminist stories, to impact on children's ability to position themselves differently in relation to the dominant cultural ideology. Gilbert maintains that classrooms will need to be concerned with how stories work in terms of how they construct and regulate social meaning, but also with how these stories may be made to work differently. Indeed Davies (1989, p.42-45) believes that if we wish children to take us seriously when we tell them that bi-polar oppressive male/female patterns are neither essential nor acceptable, then we must attempt to develop a completely new narrative form.

Davies comments in her latest work *Shards of Glass* (1993) that this disruption of knowledge of the existing discourse runs counter to the current culture of classrooms in a most profound way and will require radical change:

> Assumptions about the teacher's interpretive authority and the authority of texts, assumptions about the nature of authorship, the nature of student-teacher interaction and the understanding of the relation between knowledge and the person must all come under critical scrutiny (p.40).

Davies' discussion about how teachers position themselves as interpreters of text for children is particularly challenging for early childhood teachers. A key principle of literacy teaching in early childhood education is to encourage children to use contextual prediction to assist in gaining meaning from text. This strategy has been particularly promoted in the whole language approach to reading instruction which has been the orthodoxy in Australian schools for the last 15 years. But as Davies points out, in this process, which often operates in practice as a meta-commentary on a shared book, the teacher gives her interpretation of the text as the authoritative interpretation, at the same time as she teaches some of the mechanics of reading and of story. Davies comments:

> In becoming competent participants in the culture of the classroom, students thus learn to regard the authority of the teacher and the text as an obviousness, rather than anything that can or should be called into question (p.44).

As a teacher and principal who is held accountable by her school community if the children in her charge do not learn to read I find this feminist poststructuralist view of the teaching process most unsettling. Ideologically Davies gives very sound reasons why teachers should examine closely the practice of encouraging children to use stereotyped cultural meanings of texts as a cue to decoding text. There is a genuine dilemma however - prediction is a very effective decoding strategy and in teaching large groups of children (which unfortunately is the nature of today's economically rationalised classrooms), a teacher would ignore at her professional peril any tool which assists children in learning to read. One could argue that children could be encouraged to make individual predictions, but it is the very fact that the meanings are shared which makes prediction a valuable tool in semantic and syntactic terms.

It is particularly important to understand what is happening at the critical point when teachers are working with emergent readers. It appears that teachers are so embedded in the orthodoxy of 'natural learning' that they cannot or will not separate teaching the skills of reading from textual analysis in cultural terms. Davies comments that in effect, teachers and students have to immerse themselves in text and distance themselves from text at the same time. However, for the teacher of beginning readers, it is even more complex. Perhaps it is only in separating the different tasks, ie. learning the mechanics of reading from learn to 'read' (to interpret, to reconstitute oneself through text), that early childhood teachers will ever be able to succeed at the extraordinary balancing act Davies refers to:

> ...that is, to be the one who has a wealth of information and ideas to pass on to students (including how to interact with text differently) and creating a situation where the greater store of knowledge does not interfere with, or interrupt the students' immediate involvement with the text' (p.63).

It is certainly a challenging task to create an 'interpretative community' where the mechanical skills of reading are directed towards empowering and enriching individuals.

And indeed do teachers really have a choice, in moral terms, not to begin this process? Clark (1990, p.103) is adamant that because the school is a key institution where gendered behaviour with all its inequalities is produced, schools must recognise their potential to set in place practices, modes of organisation which do not create forms of gendered inequality.

Clearly this will be difficult and it will require a close scrutiny of the way schools are organised and of the implicit and the explicit power relationships which operate within them. Classroom practices, teacher attitudes and curriculum will need to be considered in terms of the implicit pedagogies, historical and cultural practices from which they are derived. As was alluded to earlier, I believe the principles of feminist poststructuralism will be crucial in this process of refocussing.

Weedon (1987,p. 41) maintains that feminist poststructuralism allows "...historically specific analysis, to explain the working of power on behalf of specific interests and to analyse the opportunities for resistance to it", and the research to which I now turn is one attempt at such analysis. The research study presented in Chapter 3 seeks to scrutinise the multiple discourses which can operate in a 1990's Australian classroom. By analysing my own teaching practices and curriculum, using the principles of feminist poststructuralism, I hoped to reveal both the historical and social specificity of the context in which I worked. Through such an analysis I aimed to position myself to be able to recognise and explain taken-for-granted practices of my daily teaching and thereby to begin a process of resistance and change.

CHAPTER 3

CREATING AND SUSTAINING GENDERED SUBJECTIVITIES

THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM IN KINDERGARTEN

This research was prompted by two important episodes in my life. In 1992, after two years working as a seconded university lecturer in Early Childhood Education, I returned to the school setting as a part-time kindergarten teacher and principal of a small metropolitan infant school. It was a time when the everyday 'taken for granted' practices of teaching were brought in to sharp focus for me. After two years of talking about teaching to students I suddenly felt like an observer, not a participant. It was an exciting and sobering experience. On the one hand I felt idealistic and inspired, like a first year teacher, rearing to show the world what good teaching really was about. Ironically in sharp contrast to this huge enthusiasm was the dreadful feeling that perhaps I'd forgotten how to do it! I was profoundly aware that many of the teaching practices that I had used in the past were no longer able to be accessed automatically, because of the two years away. I had to think about what I was doing and why I was doing it all day long. Those first months were an exhausting but critical time in my own professional development. Teaching 'as usual' did not exist and because of this I was given a rare opportunity to reflect on what 'it' was that I do - this strange profession, where one was supposed to feign states of mind and where omnipotence appeared to be a prerequisite for the job. The second critical event was my encounter with feminist literature and particularly that related to schooling and education. At this time I was involved in an action-research project in

which a number of teachers, kindergarten to year 12, were investigating the influence of the popular culture, and particularly the romantic story-line, in creating for girls patterns of desire which were ultimately limiting and disadvantageous. My contribution to the study was a consideration of how kindergarten girls 'read' the romance in fairytales and also in popular current children's books (Mawson, 1992). This research revealed clearly that these four year olds girls were rigidly embedded in stereotyped views of women. Whether it was a princess or fairytale character (Cinderella, Rapunzel, Gretel) or a contemporary realistically portrayed character, the majority of the girls believed women should be passive compliant and concerned primarily with appearance. The girls acknowledged that women could support male characters (eg., Gretel) but only in a nurturing, secondary role.

The findings were surprising considering that these children came from upper middle class homes, where their parents were providing a variety of very different role models and, where by and large, the children were encouraged to be articulate individuals and autonomous thinkers. During the intervention phase of the project, children's perceptions of old women, particularly grandmothers, were considered. The children were exposed to a variety of. alternative texts, they met and talked with a variety of older women who had many different roles. As referred to in Chapter 2, I found that despite this process, the girls actually rejected their own lived reality, and that of their own grandmothers, when it did not fit with the romantic, culturally produced image of a grandmother. Perhaps the only tangible change the project did instigate was that, although alternative images, were not readily accepted, it did show it was possible

to make some of the social 'givens', such as ' no one wants to be old' problematic for the children.

But why was this so difficult? Despite so many messages which contradicted these stereotypes, why did the children seem so inflexible? Why were the girls positioning themselves so rigidly,? How was I, as their teacher, and how did the school in its 'as usual' practices support the male-female dualism? I was particularly interested as a kindergarten teacher, to observe this from the first day the children entered the school system. In addition, I wondered how parents viewed this process. Did they notice it happening? Did they endorse it? Or was it just accepted as 'natural', a fact of life, something beyond their control and mine? I had much to find out and the start of the 1993 school year was the perfect opportunity to begin.

Rationale and Research Method

In the previous chapter is was argued that a poststructuralist discourse was the most appropriate for any study which sought to understand something as complex and subtle as the social construction of gender. It was seen as both logical and helpful to access the voices of those who are in classrooms and to try to understand what actually happens there, in terms of the creation of gendered subjectivities. The study reported in this chapter continues that discourse. It retains the essential elements of all qualitative research but with a distinctly feminist perspective. In declaring this a feminist research study, it is simply acknowledged that the social construction of gender is at the centre of the inquiry. In Patti Lather's words

> ... feminist researchers see gender as a basic organising principle which profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete condition of our lives ... Through the questions that feminism poses and the absences it locates, feminism argues the centrality of gender in shaping of our consciousness, skills and institutions, as well as the distribution of power and privilege (p.71).

It is also re-asserted that an essential element of such research is a discourse which recognises that the speaker/writer is never seen merely to commentate, but rather is paradoxically both 'researcher' and 'the researched'. It is maintained that it is through dialogue and reflexivity that new understandings can continually emerge. Hence this study should be viewed as part of an ongoing process of re-conceptualising, reviewing and reformulating experience.

It is difficult to categorise the research method used and it is probably better understood by describing the characteristics of its methods than by any definition. Sherman and Webb's analysis of qualitative research methods (in Ely, 1991) produced five characteristics of qualitative research which are also common to my own study. These are:-

- Events can be understood adequately only if they are seen in context. Therefore a qualitative researcher immerses her/himself in the setting.

- The contexts of inquiry are not contrived, they are natural. Nothing is pre-defined or taken for granted.

- Qualitative researchers want those who are studied to speak for themselves, to provide their own perspective's in words and actions. It is an interactive process with the researcher.

- Qualitative researchers attend to the experience as a whole, not as separate variables. The aim of qualitative research is to understand experience as unified.

- The process of qualitative research often entails appraisal of what is studied (p.4).

Certainly these elements are all evident in this study, but it is also could be described as a participant observation study as the research was undertaken by the teacher whose main goal was to simultaneously observe what happened in her *own* classroom, and to get immediate feedback for refining that what she was doing in that classroom. (Reinharz, 1992; Lather 1991) describe a variety of feminist research methods but common to any form of *participant* study is the notion that the distinction between the 'researcher' and the 'researched' disappears. (Reinharz, p181). This study sought to understand and describe the reality of one classroom, specifically in terms of its gendered practices, so that appropriate future plans could be developed. It was always intended to be, and it is, part of a continuing process of planning and implementing an actual class-program.

All research models have inherent problems and the difficulties which arose in this study were often due to these multiple roles, teacher, researcher and researched. Some of these problems were simply practical ones, such as time constraints or lack of opportunities to record and observe while trying to teach. Other more complex problems arose because of the contradictory responsibilities and/or focus of the teacher and the participant researcher. For example, a researcher may be in a position simply to observe and record an incident where children harassed other children, but the professional responsibility of the teacher would necessitate intervention in such an instance, and this would automatically alter the research.

A further difficulty was how to categorise the observations made. This was in part addressed by a conscious decision to adhere to the principles of a qualitative research model using a poststructuralist perspective. Working within these parameters it was not desirable to contrive or separate the various influences, but rather, the aim was to understand each experience as part of a unified whole.

Thus it was decided to focus both observations and interviews on the different contexts of children's experiences, rather than on particular types of behaviour, or particular teacher practices.

Observations were made of the children's play during inside activity time, where the activities were often teacher directed and then at outside time, which was the least directed context. Children were interviewed about their play and parents were surveyed for their observations about eight weeks after the school year began. Notes were recorded in a journal at the time of observation or interview, and while this was not an ideal method, it was the kind of compromise which had to be made by a researcher whose full time job was teaching. The parent survey notes and journal entries are recorded in Appendices 2 and 3.

It is acknowledged that this type of research will never give 'hard-data', 'norms' or statistics which detail 'how many' or 'how much'; however the method and the discourse are seen as most appropriate to both the nature of the subject matter itself and to the intended audience. As was made clear in the previous review of research, the social construction of gender is seen to be a subtle, interactive process of cultural positioning which can best be observed by describing and understanding the people involved, and the contexts within which they operate. In the research report which follows, the actual classroom context is seen to be

an integral part of the whole process and therefore the physical setting and the classroom practices have been described in detail. It is assumed that any new insights about the construction of gender in kindergarten will only emerge from understanding fully the actual context of the particular kindergarten.

Further, the intended audience is teachers, and so the conversational tone and the action-research model were specifically chosen to engage practitioners in an ongoing dialogue about their own profession. It is reasonable to assert that teachers <u>are</u> interested in what other teachers do and find out in their own classrooms. And indeed, the value of the research and its validity can further be confirmed, if the findings are made readily accessible to teachers by a discourse which they recognise as relevant to their experience.

Focus of the Research

When I undertook this study, both the review of the literature and the classroom research, I hoped to achieve two things.

Firstly, while I had ample evidence from other sources that schools and teaching practices contribute significantly to the construction and maintenance of stereotyped gender roles I needed to confirm this was happening in my classroom. I considered myself to be more aware than many of my colleagues about gender issues, and because of this, I was always making mental adjustments that these research findings did not really apply to my 'gender-enlightened classroom'. I needed to know with my heart, not my head, just what was really happening every day in my own classroom.

Secondly, because I am a principal as well as a teacher I wanted to gain insights into this issue of gender construction, which would be useful to schools and systems in planning for change. I hoped to start modestly with my own small school but also to share these insights with other schools, through their principals.

KINDERGARTEN 1993: SANDY BAY INFANT SCHOOL

In today's classrooms there is a noticeable absence of blackboards, dusters and desks. Most teachers have considerable freedom in deciding how to set up their classrooms and the decisions they make reflect clearly their beliefs about how children learn. I took great care in arranging my kinder room before the start of the new school year. There were open areas for children to build and to play floor games, a quiet corner for reading and thinking, tables for making messy things, easels for painting, places for drawing, writing and puzzles, a listening post and a computer. One whole 'wing' of the room was designated the 'Pretend Place'. In Pretend Place, block play and dress-ups had been set up together as a way of encouraging interaction between two stereotyped female/male activity areas. In Pretend Place there were many multi-purpose materials, a variety of hats, belts and shoes. There were also some animals masks and costumes to complement the first 'theme' for class work, which was to be the Circus. Among the big wooden blocks were some wooden cars, trucks and some army tanks which I had dismantled to make 'multipurpose vehicles'. Around the room at the different locations were information sheets for parents, explaining why I believed 'Pretend Place' and 'Listening Post' etc. were important to children's learning and with

suggestions for ways parent helpers might like to work with children in these areas. All was in readiness, the children's lockers were marked with their names and (non-sexist) animal pictures.

I had discussed with the teacher aide who worked with me each day the importance of using non-sexist language and avoiding unnecessary differentiation between boys and girls. And then they came - twenty-five smiling and crying rugged individualists - fresh from the family nest!

The Teacher-Researcher and the Child: a paradoxical power relationship

A colleague of mine sardonically refers to children when they begin school as 'feral' kinders - and indeed there is something wonderfully frustrating and liberating about working with children who are not yet embedded in the stereotyped child-adult power relationships. Many four year olds at the beginning of kinder do not yet subscribe to the norms of adult-child relationships and this was one reason why I felt it was imperative to begin my observations right at the beginning of the school year. And indeed it was only during those first three weeks that the children in the class responded to me as though they had a choice in allowing my intrusion into their play. For example in week 1, I was hovering near the outside cubby house, listening to a group of girls playing, when one child noticed my presence and asked me firmly to '*stop spying on them*"' The following week a child building with the big blocks was clearly irritated by my close proximity and told me '*You can go away now Mrs Mawson*'. After these two instances, however, I cannot recall children so directly asserting their rights to privacy in their play. After that I was tolerated, 'translated for', revered and looked to for support, but certainly my presence was never neutral or ignored.

This question of power posed a real problem for me in my role as researcher and continues to be so in my teaching role. Bronwyn Davies, in *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales* (1989) notes how the unquestioned power that adults have over children can seriously impede children's agency or control over events. This power is even more persuasive when adult power is compounded by teacher power.

Teacher power for kindergarten children is constituted even before they start school. This conversation took place between Gillian and her mother on the first day of school. It was almost 9 o'clock and the room was a buzz of voices, mothers, children, toddlers:

> Mum *Here's your bag Gillian I've put your fruit in the basket and Mrs Mawson will give it to you later. I have to go now but you be a good girl and do everything Mrs Mawson tells you to.*
>
> (Journal, February)

In effect Gillian's mother removes all agency from her child and constitutes all power to the teacher. Mum organises the fruit, Mrs Mawson will decide when it will be eaten. Gillian is not directed to do anything particular at school, just to be 'good' and compliant to the teacher's wishes. I think perhaps I noticed this conversation among all the other noise that day, because I had made myself a mental note that 'good girl' was not going to be part of my praise repertoire this year and I knew it was going to require a great deal of explicit mental energy to change this.

During the next few days I noted down comments from parents to their children as they left them at school and was interested to find how often parents exhorted their child to 'be good', or to do 'what the teacher says'. What was also interesting was the difference between the messages

the girls received from their parents, and those messages the boys were given. Girls were regularly told *'to have a good day', 'to do what Mrs Mawson want you to'* or *'to be good!'* Only once did I hear a parent ask a boy *'to do what the teacher says'*, most farewells were directing the boys *to have a good time', 'a nice time', 'good day'* or to do some specific task eg., *'come and have a turn with the puzzles' or 'see what's on the computer'.* (Journal Notes: February)

It seems girls were more likely to be positioned as lacking agency, compliant and passive. Boys, while being positioned as 'children' in an adult-child discourse, were more likely to be given a mandate to enjoy themselves and to be active. Clearly, apart from the obvious confirmation of teacher power by parents, there was also a more subtle positioning of children into stereotypical roles which was occurring as the children were initiated into the school system.

Kamler's research (1993) which examined the ways everyday classroom practices are used during the first few weeks of school to discipline children's bodies, is particularly interesting in this regard. Kamler focused on teacher-talk, games and songs and how these were used to regulate children's bodies in order to 'achieve the work of the institution' (p.10). Kamler looked at how teachers used the naming of children, during group time, as a way of singling out both transgressions and compliance. Her analysis of these practices showed clearly that this was the site of much of the 'gendering work' done in classrooms. She observed that there was a discernible pattern to these interactions where girls were more often named 'for being willing subjects, for bodily obedience and compliance', while boys were positioned 'negatively as having bodies which are hard to control' (p.10). Kamler comments that

exceptions to these stereotypes appeared to go unnoticed by the teacher because :

> ... the teacher gaze itself, is constituted within the male-female dualisms; and what is seen and what is named is always partial, meaning, both incomplete and interested (p.20).

One of the most significant aspects of research such as Kamler's is the recognition that the gendered nature of such practices is unnoticed by teachers. And indeed as Willes in her work *Children Becoming Pupils; a Study of discourse in Nursery and Reception class* (1981) found, the whole process of becoming a pupil, of learning the rules of the classroom, is actually invisible to both the teachers and the pupils. 'Children are taught to engage in the discourse of the classroom very much like they are taught a variety of other games played by rules - with minimal explanation' (p.57).

This question of how teachers use their power needs teasing out further, in how it both constrains and empowers children. In Chapter 2 I put forward the proposition that the orthodoxy of kindergarten teaching, which sees children's right to choose as sacrosanct, is actually an abdication of professional responsibility. Consequently my own teaching program consists of both teacher-directed and child-initiated activity. During the first half-hour of the day, as children are arriving, the activity is unstructured. Children are able to explore the classroom, to take out toys or puzzles etc., and to interact freely with children and adults in the room.

During the three and a half hour session approximately. one hour is spent together as a group in fifteen minute storying, group writing,

show and tell, and music sessions. The children have unstructured outdoor play for approximately forty-five minutes and the inside activity session last for about one and half hours. During this indoor session, I direct children to their first activity, after that they are able to choose among the special activities set up for the day, and the activities which are always available, eg. blocks, listening post, dramatic play.

At the beginning of the year, children would quite often tell me that they didn't want to do something I had directed them towards, and my response was always - *'that's fine, you choose something else now but I would like you to do this a little bit later'*. I would then ensure that the child moved onto the teacher-chosen activity later in the session. This system continues today, the children have come to accept my authority and there is rarely dissent. I justify this overt use of teacher power because I have had confirmed from past experience, and from research findings such as Davies (1989, 1993), Ebbeck (1985) and Clark (1990) that both girls and boys will miss out on valuable learning experiences if given the right to refuse to participate. As Clark (1990) referred to it, I believe what I do is to impose explicit constraints on moral and educational grounds. But what are the actual educational outcomes for children? Do they justify this denial of choice? A critical reason for adopting this way of teaching in kindergarten was to ensure girls had experiences with spatial and construction activities, and boys had experiences in rehearsal and practise of expressive language through dramatic play. But how did this work in practice, in my ideologically sound Pretend Place?

Pretend Place: Female Power in Action

As mentioned earlier, Pretend Place at the beginning of the year included blocks, various multi-purpose costumes and some props specifically associated with the Circus, our class theme. During the first weeks I would direct a mixed-gender group of five or six children to play in Pretend Place. Sometimes I reminded the children about what we talked about at circle time (ie. acrobats and animals, Big Tops etc.) and suggested they might like to build a circus ring or to be an acrobat, at other times no comment was made. Generally the children were left alone after that, with little adult interaction. On these occasions the boys would almost invariably go to the block-end of Pretend Place and the girls to the dress ups. The boys never responded to my suggestions about building something to do with the Circus and invariably built 'traps' or 'forts'. The girls in dress ups, did play acrobats and animals (with masks) but by far the most popular prop was the tutu I had put there for the trapeze character. The majority of play in dress-ups continued to be domestic play involving mothers and babies. Occasionally there was some argument about who was going to be the baby and inevitably the smallest child was assigned this role.

By and large the girls ignored the boys, they showed no interest in playing with them or the blocks. On one occasion which I observed, Michael came over from blocks and stood watching the play. Susan was clearly annoyed by his presence and told him quite firmly to go back to blocks or she would tell Mrs Mawson. It is interesting that Susan felt she was within her rights to invoke the authority of the teacher, presumably because she anticipated some argument and I was expected to referee. There were some other occasions when children (mostly boys) playing in

blocks would join the dress up children (mostly girls) and the games would combine, but these occasions were rare.

It is interesting to reflect on what seemed to be happening. My decision to put blocks and dress-ups together was to encourage interactive play between the children using these areas. Further, I hoped to give teacher-validation to both types of play, for boys and girls, by making it non-negotiable that all children played in Pretend Place at sometime. It was also seen as the most direct way to ensure all children had a balance of learning activities.

The outcomes were not as I anticipated. Firstly, because I did not specify what the children had to do in Pretend Place, the children automatically self-sex segregated - boys to blocks, girls to dress-ups. Secondly, as was noted by Davies (1989, 1993) and Clark (1990), girls seem to have the most power within a domestic discourse and so continually reverted to this type of play while resisting any intrusion from the boys. Generally, the boys playing in blocks worked independently of the girls, and also of each other, but because the domestic play was so empowering for the girls, they in effect marginalised the block players. The boys were tolerated but certainly not included. When the boys were really insistent about joining in, the girls recognised that they did not have the power to exclude them, but could maintain their power over the game by ensuring it remained within the domestic sphere.

Sophie's comment in the following conversation clearly demonstrates this. I had asked a group of girls playing in dress-ups, if boys and girls liked to play the same games:

Amy	*Sometimes.*
Mary	*You need a boy to be the dad when your playing.*

Sophie *Yeah, and if you're playing your own game and the boys come and annoy you then you have to let them be something*
(Journal, April)

Sophie knows the rules well. If she wants to retain power in the game she will have to ensure boys are in the least powerful position And indeed 'the father' in domestic play has very little power compared with the mother or the aunty or the big sister, who usually directs the play, or even the baby who is allowed to gain power by crying and being cute. MacNaughton's study (1993) which looked at the power relation within children's play, confirms that such vying for power is a common occurrence in home-corner. MacNaughton's research group found girls preferred 'girls only' play because they feared boys destructive potential and so responded either by leaving the play or by assigning the boys positions in non-destructive roles:

> Being positioned as 'Dad' either silenced them or meant they left. Dad was often a non-role because within the domestic sphere of cooking, cleaning etc, neither boys nor girls appeared to understand Dad as active (p.6).

Walkerdine (1990) observed how important it was to see girls as actively struggling with the boys to recreate situations as ones in which they are powerful. It is only in recognising that girls are not passive and dependent that we acknowledge that they have the desire and also the capacity to change discourses which position them as inferior and disadvantaged.

Of course there were exceptions to the sex segregation described, and three boys (out of the 12 boys in the class) were always welcome in the domestic play of the girls. At the beginning of the year they often sought

to be included. Nathan was particularly interested and would dress up in anything available and would adopt a variety of roles. He seemed happy to be involved at any level, as the baby, the mother or the father, occasionally leading, at other times very much lacking in power. Both Nathan's parents commented (Parent Survey April/May 1993) that there had been a noticeable change in his behaviour since starting school. In response to the question which asked parents if they could 'recall any changes in behaviour since your child came to school, which seemed to indicate a change in attitude to the opposite sex?', Nathan's mother replied:

> *Nathan doesn't play with dolls as much, but still likes cooking and helping in the house and helping with baby brother.*

Nathan's father's response to the same question was:

> *Having two older sisters, Nathan did not seem to fit the normal male stereotype prior to starting school (eg. dolls and dressing up were regular activities). This has become increasingly rare.*
>
> (Parent survey, April)

These observations were made only eight weeks or so into the new school year. But what was happening to Nathan in my wonderful, ideologically sound classroom?

Davies (1989) would call it 'category maintenance' (p.28). Davies maintains that in early childhood classrooms particularly, children are constantly seeking to maintain and define meaningful categories, with which to organise and understand their world. Gender, as opposite and antithetical is a primary category and is assiduously preserved by children to maintain their own sense of social competence. Nathan was sorting out lots of things about his world but, at this point in his life, one of the

most pressing puzzles was to work out what was 'supposed' to happen at school. It became obvious very quickly to Nathan ,that boys were not 'supposed' to play dress-ups, so he didn't. Other comments from boys indicated that this form of categorising, strictly along gender lines, and the maintenance of these, was important enough to actually ignore reality to achieve this. For example, David, one of the three boys who at the beginning of the year regularly played dress-ups and other games with the girls, told his aunt a few weeks after starting school that '*You're not allowed to play with girls at school.*' (Journal, March). When pressed about why this might be so, he replied that *"he would get into trouble"*. When pressed further he couldn't say why or who would create 'the trouble'. He just knew it.

Another child, John, told his father that Pretend Place was only for girls and '*that it only had clothes for girls*' (Parent survey, April). This was despite the fact that I had made particular effort to include many multi-purpose cross-gender props. John chose not to recognise this because the girls' dominance in Pretend Place had defined it clearly as female and John now needed to preserve that category. There is some evidence (Maccoby 1988, Bussey 1990) that boys are more strongly sex-typed than girls and are more likely to be less tolerant of peers who 'deviate' into cross-sex behaviour. Bussey (p.102) speculates that category maintenance for boys is much stronger than for girls because they have much to lose if they are not specifically identified as males in a society where men are accorded more power and status than women. For boys the process of gender construction is a dual one, firstly aligning oneself as a boy with other boys, and secondly, rejecting any desire to be like a girl. Girls on the other hand could only have something to gain by aligning

themselves with higher status males, and so their process of gender development is a unitary one, characterised by a single motivation, to be like other girls, and as such, requires less maintenance. As Bussey notes, girls are thus in a double bind:

> ... they prefer to do things like other girls, but realise there are few power or status advantages in following such a course of action. Consequently, they are less likely to reject the male role, than boys are likely to reject the female role (p.103).

I found comments from parents supported the proposition that boys find it very important to position themselves very specifically as male - and separate from girls.

Nathan, who was obviously doing a lot of work to position himself as <u>not</u> like girls by rejecting the dressing up activities he had enjoyed previously was also working towards being <u>like</u> boys. He told his mother that *'girls weren't as strong as boys, that boys could run faster"* 'and he told his father *'That boys can fight'* (Parent survey, April). At the same time, at school, Nathan was now joining in the running and chasing games which seemed to dominate the boys' outdoor play time.

It was also interesting to note that some parents saw this process of alignment into a specific gender group as both a positive and natural part of their child's development. John's father commented:

> *I feel John is much more comfortable socially now his role has been confirmed.* (Parent survey, April)

Clearly John's father recognised a site of struggle for his son and saw a resolution of that as his son positioned himself separately as a male.

Another boy in the class, Dino, told his Mum '*that tough games were only for boys*' and she commented to me that this represented a marked change in attitude (Parent survey, May).

I was particularly interested and concerned about a phenomenon which was highlighted by one parent's response that behaviour at the child-care centre, which many of the children attended, was different from their behaviour at school

> *Seems to play more exclusively with boys than when at creche full-time. Interested in rough games which has only been evident since starting school. At creche there was no marked evidence of difference in attitude between boys and girls.* (Parent survey, May)

What was different now the children were at school? I felt as if I was actively working to break down practices which unnecessarily differentiated between boys and girls and yet the children were obviously making judgements that cross-gendered activities were appropriate at creche but not at school.

Bussey's observation (1990, p.103) that at five years old there is an emerging awareness among boys of the power invested in the male role and of the lower status of female roles, perhaps explains this in some way. In other words, the children's growing experience of the world allows them to interpret the implicit messages of the patriarchal society and to position themselves accordingly. However Maccoby (1988) cites studies by Thorne, (1986) Luria and Herzoy (1985) and Locklied and Kline (1985) which show that segregation is greatest in situations that have <u>not</u> been structured by adults. Certainly in comparison to the child-care program, my kindergarten was very structured.

Another explanation offered by Maccoby for this sex segregation is the different play styles of boys and girls. Her review of the research indicated that boys' play is characterised by rough, physical, body contact while girls' play, although still very active, does not often involve body contact. The interesting point, though, is that children's play preferences as they grow older seem to be clearly associated with their ability to influence their playmates and to have power in the play. Maccoby notes that girls' use of verbal persuasion was effective with girls but ineffective with boys, while boys' use of physical persuasion was effective with both boys and girls. Maccoby comments:

> It is reasonable to assume that, in any relationship that is freely entered into by both parties, the relationship is more likely to be continued overtime and be satisfactory to both parties if each can influence the behaviour of the other. If girls develop influence styles which are ineffective with boys, this becomes a reason for avoiding interaction with them. It would also be a reason for girls to seek out situations in which their influence styles would work with boys-situations in which they might more easily hold their own in any conflicts over access to desired resources (p.758).

Clearly the findings of both Bussey and Maccoby show that it is a child's perception of their own potential for power which strongly influences both the nature of their play and their companions in that play. The proposition is also confirmed by parental observations.

John's mother could see her son actively aligning himself with boys by adopting a more physical and aggressive attitude:

> *General play is rougher and more aggressive. Prior to kinder when introduced to a new playmate, John would hang back, reserved, obviously unsure of the right thing to do. Now, when meeting with another boy [for the first time] - chasing and rough housing seems to be common ground.* (Parent survey, April)

Katie's mother commented on her daughter's growing awareness of her female power:

> *She is definitely more aware of the difference between boys and girls since starting school. Previously in our family I don't think it was at all important to her even though all her siblings were boys. Now she often sings/teases by saying 'girls are the best, boy's are worst' I had never heard this (until a few months ago) from her ... she seems more aware of the difference. She cries if her brothers tease her in 'a poor little girl' fashion, and generally manages to gently manipulate them because she is 'a little girl'. I don't think she's aware of doing this but is very successful.* (Parent Survey, May)

Katie's mother's concluding comments confirm how invisible the process of positioning oneself according to gendered stereotypes actually is:

> *All of the above has occurred very subtly and gently and I probably would not have really noticed anything until questioned about it. It is very real though and all the more interesting in our family because she has grown up with boys only at home.* Parent survey, May)

The Playground

My observations of the shifting relationships which developed in Pretend Place confirmed for me that girls struggle to win power and do so successfully within the domestic sphere. On the playground however, where the play is not directed or structured, it is a very different story. Out there power is all about physical dominance and the verbal coercion which was powerful in Pretend Place is rendered totally ineffective.

A number of researchers (Thorne, 1992; Clark, 1990; Maccoby 1988) have documented how commonly boys control whole sections of the

playground; however I did not anticipate that this would be of significance with my kindergarten class. I timetabled for the outdoor play to occur when the other classes were inside so the twenty five four year olds had a playground large enough to accommodate at least one hundred children all to themselves. There was however great competition for use of the bikes and scooter and generally the boys were more interested in getting a turn, than were the girls. Although turns on the bikes were quite strictly rostered often boys used physical coercion to get girls to forgo their turn. This usually involved jumping on the back cross bar of a bike, or in the trailer, which made it very difficult for the person who was peddling. On many occasions the girls would then relinquish their turn and go and play somewhere else. In an attempt to counteract this I introduced a 'no dinking' rule, but unless I was in close proximity when the changeover happened, it was not possible to be sure whether one child had coerced another.

No matter what the alternative, playground play for the boys was usually very physical. At outside time there was always a variety of activities set up, and apart from the rostering on the bikes, children were given a great deal of choice about what they did. Only occasionally were they directed to work with the teacher aide, the teacher or a parent on some specific physical skills game. Given the lack of constraints it was interesting to note how quickly the play outside became strictly segregated along gender lines. Each day the children could move freely between activities - the sand pit (with changing props; water, hoses, etc); wheat-trolley; water play; chalk drawing on the asphalt; painting, hoops, balls, construction tools and hats, dinosaurs models, dress-up clothes and props. The playground also had elaborate climbing equipment; slides,

swings, monkey bars, tree houses and cubbies. Despite all this almost every day the majority of boys would play chasing games, with each other, or with the girls. The majority of girls would choose dressing up, climbing on the monkey bars, painting or drawing and occasionally, willingly or unwillingly, were drawn into the chasing game. There were some exceptions to this, but certainly the chasing game impacted on the play of all the children. As the term progressed, more and more boys seemed to enter the chase and more girls looked to me for support to *'stop the boys chasing us'*.

But what was happening here? Every day at lunchtime I had observed the older children in the school involved in this sort of play-chase, elude, catch and sometimes rescue game, but I was surprised to find it so prevalent among these kindergarten children, who never interacted with the older children while they were at school. Thorne (1990) refers to this kind of game as 'Borderwork', forms of cross-sex interaction which are based upon, and reaffirm, boundaries and asymmetries between boys' and girls' groups (p.121). Clearly in Kinder it was a some what thrilling form of category maintenance. There was an element of risk, but each sex soon learned their 'appropriate' role in the play. For the boys it was an essential defining characteristic of their 'maleness' - an incorrigible proposition not open to scrutiny as John's comments to his mother indicate. John's mother asked him why he chased girls:

John *Because it's fun*
Mum *What's fun about it?*
John *I don't know it's just what you* do (my emphasis)
(Parent Survey, 1993)

I asked a group of boys to come and chat to me while we were outside one day and I asked them about the games they liked to play.

Their replies centred around active games - bikes, basketball, kicking the ball, soccer. In an attempt to 'broaden' the conversation, I rephrased the question and asked:

B.M	*What kind of pretend games do you like to play?*
Michael	*War*
Michael	*Armies*
Yanni	*Getting the girls*
David	*Chasing the girls*
B.M.	*Why do you like chasing girls?*
David	*Cos they scream* (great laughter)
B.M.	*Do the girls like it?*
Mathew	*No way*
B.M.	*Why not?*
David	*Mm they don't like getting caught.*
B.M.	*Do boys chase boys?*

This question created great laughter and the boys literally 'fell about laughing' in a melodramatic way.

David	*No* ..(with great emphasis)
B.M.	*Why?*
Mathew	*You can't catch boys ... 'cos boys can run faster.*
	Yeah and boys are strong"
	(Journal, April)

There were a number of things which are worth considering in this conversation. Firstly, the chasing game did not feature in the response to the initial question.

When the idea of 'pretend' games was introduced it was responded to by two of the boys but clearly the group saw this as separate from the 'real' self-directed play like kicking the ball. Secondly, although I had seen boys chasing each other on many occasions, the discourse created on this occasion was all about positioning boys as powerful in relation to girls and to concede boys as capable of being weak, the pursued, would be

problematic. Instead they chose to ignore the reality and concentrate on creating and maintaining the image of male strength.

The girls' perception of the chase was predicably very different. I created an opportunity to speak with some of the girls and asked them about the games they liked to play. Most replies concerned imaginative and domestic play - mothers and fathers, hide and seek, princesses, queens, babies, mothers, tea parties? Puzzles, drawings, swings and slides were also mentioned and one child, Lara, mentioned chasing:

B.M	*Do boys play these games?*
Susan	*No.*
Sophie	*Some boys do.*
Brodie	*Some boys like to be princes.*
Lara	*I like playing chasing with the boys*
B.M.	*Do you chase the boys?*
Susan & Lara	*No.*
B.M.	*Why not?*
Cherie	*Cos girls don't feel like it.*
B.M.	*Well why do boys chase all the time?*
Susan	*Cos they're boys.*
Lara	*Cos they like kissing girls.*

It is worth noting that these observations confirm the proposition that girls are marginalised during outside play. Most of the games mentioned are played in cubbies or under trees, around the outskirts of the playground. Little mention is made of other physical games which take up more space. A comment from Lara's mother indicated that Lara believed that the boys appear 'to control the apparatus', and this may explain why no mention was made of the climbing frame or the monkey bars. In reality I often saw the girls on this equipment, but Lara's comment to Mum made me wonder whether the girls only played there when I was outside or nearby.

The girls perception of the chasing is also interesting. Chasing is definitely the prerogative of the boys - *'cos girls don't feel like it and just <u>because</u> - 'cos they're boys.*'. Clearly the girls, like the boys, do not believe this is open to question. It just <u>is.</u> Boys are constituted as powerful, as pursuers and girls as powerless and in need of agency. On one occasion I observed a 'pack' of girls chasing a disparate group of boys. This was a rare event and what was interesting was the 'lead' girl was carrying a large Tasmanian Devil toy and was roaring ferociously. It seems girls can provide their own agency (ie. a powerful animal) <u>but</u> female power alone could never be reconstituted as equal to male power. A later conversation with another group of girls gives an insight into the contradictory and implicitly sexual nature of the chase.

B.M.	*Do boys and girls play the same games?*
	No! No! (Chorus)
B.M.	*Why not?*
Amy	*Cos they don't like to.*
April	*Sometimes you can play 'crashes' with boys.*
B.M.	*Do girls chase boys?*
Chris	*Only if they're little.*
B.M.	*Why do boys like chasing girls?*
Amy	*'Cos they want to play with you - only you don't like it*
Lucy	*Yeah some girls are scared - they scream.*
Mary	*But some girls like to kiss boys.*
B.M.	*Why?*
Amy	*Don't know.*
Belinda	*They really do hate us.*
Lara	*Boys sort of chase us - they never say please but they want to like you.*

Belinda	*When the girls say don't do it the boys think they are just tricking that you really want to be chased but I get worried.*
April	*They feel like they want to kill you.*
Mary	*Some boys say they're going to save us but they really want to kill you.*

Chasing is clearly about physical power ie. girls only chase boys who are smaller than they are. While kissing introduces a sexual element to the game, the girls' comments are certainly more concerned with physical threat than sexuality. It is a violent discourse and when I re-read this some weeks after recording the comments, I was genuinely surprised that I had not noticed before how threatened the girls were feeling.

In the past I have recognised the chasing games as implicitly sexual, but the girls' comments made me aware for the first time that, because of the unequal power relations involved, it really was sexual harassment. Belinda's comment particularly worried me. In the Australian press recently (The Mercury, January, April, May, 1993) there have been a number of cases where judges have shown a profound lack of understanding of this issue; and one judge had commented that 'No' can subsequently come to mean 'Yes'. Here, from the mouth of a four year old, was the scenario which can be played out in adult life: *'They think you are just tricking, that you really want to be chased, but I get worried'*

As Clark (1990) comments, teachers find it an anathema to accept that children's behaviour is anything other than innocent, because their whole teaching philosophy is based on this premise. It is exceedingly problematic to view children's games as sexual and violent and yet it is clear this is how the children view it.

Walkerdine (1990, p.5) highlighted how young boys quickly learn that they are positioned more powerfully within discourses which are essentially sexual and the following episode reveals clearly that children can very readily change the discourse to assume this power. The following conversation took place in Pretend Place when it was set up as a Radiography department and the area included a small dark-room. The class had previously decided that only four children would be allowed to play in the dark-room at the same time.

Mathew	*Can John and David play in the dark-room with me?*
B.M.	*Yes , that's O.K. , no one else is there at the moment.*

(The boys went straight into the darkroom and unbeknown to them Susan followed and tried to enter after them.)

Mathew	*You can't come in here!*
Susan	*Yes I can! There's only three people, you're allowed to have four* (at this point Susan forced her way into the darkroom. There was a short silence and then Mathew's voice was heard).
Mathew	*Quick! X-ray her bosoms!*

(Journal, June 1993)

In this exchange Matthew's power was threatened but, under the class rules, he knew he could not invoke either the teacher's support or the support of his peers. Instead he turned the discourse away from the classroom and positioned Susan not as a classmate, but specifically as a female. By referring directly to Susan's sexuality (her bosoms) he was able to reconstitute himself as powerful, within a traditional male\female discourse. As a teacher, I felt it necessary to intervene and so asked Matthew whether he thought Susan would like to have her bosoms x-

rayed. He replied, he did not know and so I reminded him of the class rule, ie that in our class we never did things to people they did not like and suggested to him that he think about his game more carefully.

I believe it reasonable to assert that the outcome of this episode would have been very different if the fourth person had been a boy. While it is possible that the three boys may have tried to prevent another boy from joining their game, it is most unlikely that they would have done this by positioning that boy as a sexual being. Gender is not a consideration within boys power relationships. Boys are defined, by other boys and girls, in far more complex ways than simply by their sex.

The following episode with Andrew (aged 5) is interesting to consider in these terms. Andrew was working busily on a drawing and shouting to the children at his table, 'Look *I'm drawing vagina traps*' (repeated a number of times). The teacher aide went over and asked what he was drawing; *Girl traps' he* replied. The conversation was reported to me by the teacher assistant, as she felt concerned that she had not handled the situation well. Later I had an opportunity to talk with Andrew and I asked him about his drawing:

B.M.	*Why do you like drawing girl traps?*
Andrew	*Because its fun!"*
B.M.	*Why?*
Andrew	*It just is.*
B.M.	*Why do you call them vagina traps?*
Andrew	*Cos they're for girls.*
B.M.	*Are girls and vaginas the same?*
Andrew	*Mm Yes*
B.M.	*Why do you like traps for girls*
Andrew	*Because they run away.*
B.M.	*So you chase them?*

Andrew	*Yes*
B.M.	*Do you chase boys?*
Andrew	*No.*
B.M.	*Why?*
Andrew	*'Cos they hit you if you catch them.*
B.M.	*And girls don't?*
Andrew	*No, you can just stop them and then someone gets up behind them and then we get them!*
B.M.	*What do they do?*
Andrew	*They squeal.*

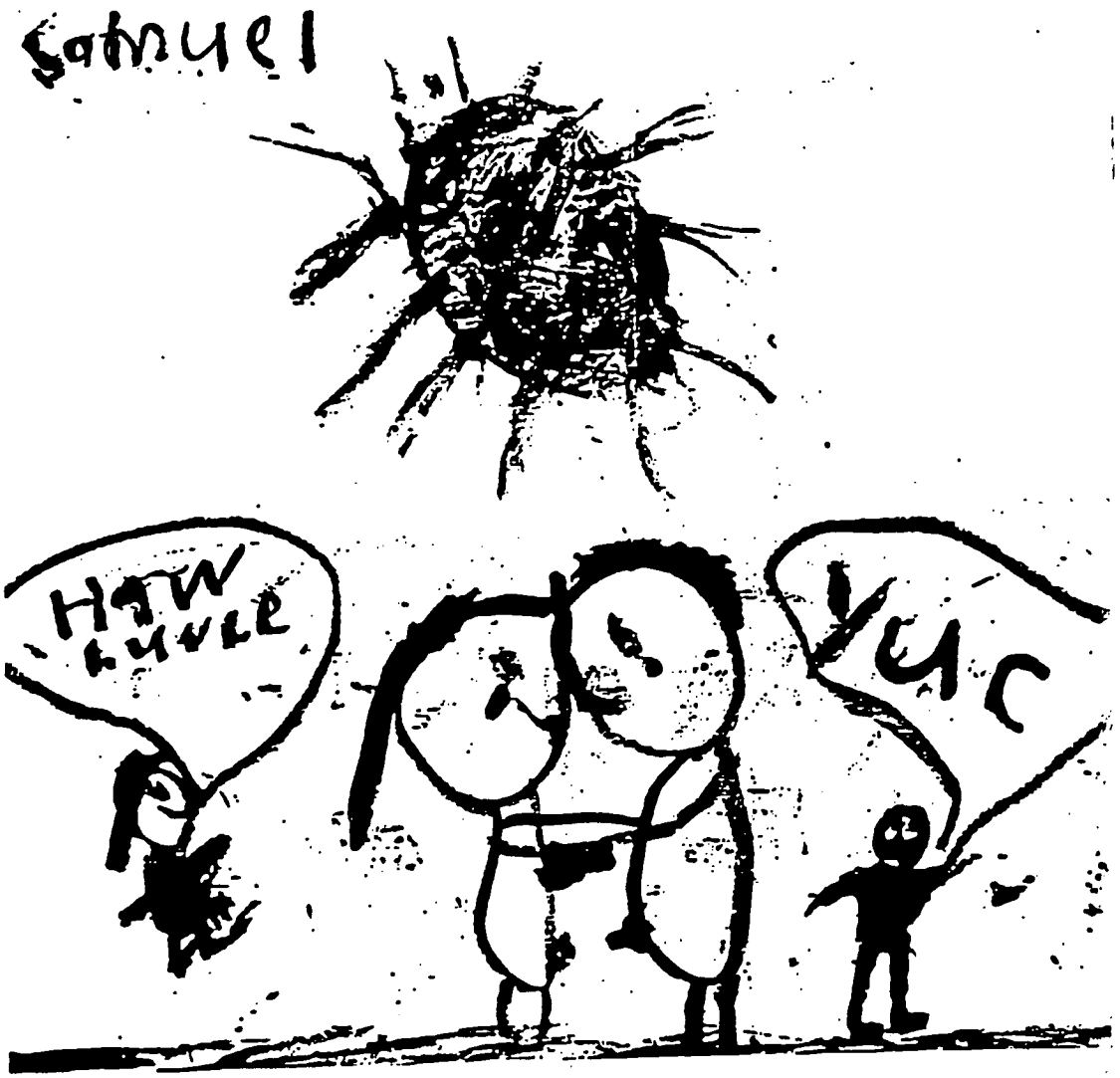
Andrew called his drawing 'vagina traps' to attract attention from his peers. He recognised that the explicitly sexual language would be considered inappropriate by adults, so by default it would win attention from the other children. To avoid adult attention, he translated 'vagina' to 'girl' when an adult approached. In his conversation with me Andrew showed he knew the rules of the chase well, 'girls' and 'vaginas' could be used interchangeably because, already for Andrew, girls were defined as people, more by their gender than by any other category or trait. And significantly, their gender innately positioned them as weak and vulnerable to male power.

If I was in any doubt about the overt sexuality of the chasing game, it disappeared after a discussion with a parent of a child in Grade 1. A mother had made an appointment specifically to discuss with me the problem her daughter had with being 'sexed by the boys on the playground!' It seemed that the 'chase and kiss game' which the older children played was actually referred to by the children as 'sexing'. The girls 'sexed' the boys (ie. kissed) if they were chased, and the boys referred to the chase as 'sexing the girls'.

After some discussion with colleagues at other schools, and with the parents at my own school, I discovered that the use of 'kiss' and 'sex' interchangeably among young children was quite common. While this represents a shift towards a more conscious awareness of sexuality, there was little difference in the conduct of the actual chase game from that observed in schools for generations. The power relations remain just as contradictory and shifting. The essential element of the chase is still constituted by male physical power - but, because the girls recognise that, the maintenance of separate gender categories is very important to the boys, the girls are able to shift the power relations in their own favour, by crossing the gender boundaries - ie. by kissing the boys. In other words, the girls acquire power because they have recognised a site of resistance for the boys, that is, the boys strong need to avoid any identification or association with girls.

The drawing reproduced on the next page was done by a six year old boy and shows very plainly how he views this in practice. The main characters are the boy and girl in the centre of the picture. These children have explicit genitalia. In the background to one side is a boy observing this who exclaims his disgust (Yuk!) while the girl observing exclaims her delight (How Luvlee (sic)). The boys position themselves powerfully by rejecting alignment with girls, and the girls position themselves powerfully by doing the opposite, that is, by aligning themselves with the boys.

The relationship is complicated further by a recognition of their own sexuality which clearly gets in the way of total sex segregation. Clearly it is never so simplistic - that maleness signifies power and femaleness signifies powerlessness.


Samuel
HAW
YUC

Clothes Maketh the Man --- but more so the Woman

There were some situations however, where it was simple - where being constituted as female could only be construed as a disadvantage. I consistently observed that parents' choice of clothing for their daughters significantly decreased their children's learning opportunities. Many of the girls came to school each day in 'party shoes' and Laura Ashley style dresses. Despite my numerous interventions (eg. providing boots, smocks, etc), this severely inhibited them in their play: for example, patent leather shoes with buckles and shiny soles are very slippery on the playground. It did not take many hurt knees or skinned knuckles before the girls who wore these shoes decided not to run or jump at all during outside time. I observed an incident in the sandpit which clearly showed the constraints put upon the girls by culturally created standards of dress. In the sandpit the children were given buckets of water, leaves, natural materials, toys etc. specifically to extend and enrich their play but, as the following conversation shows, there is often a stronger power at work in deciding the outcome of an experience, than any inherent interest in the activity itself. When this conversation was noted, there were three boys and three girls playing in the sandpit.

The girls had the rubber dinosaurs (which were in great demand) and because of their ownership of the dinosaurs the girls were leading the play. Miranda was directing both the boys and the girls with comments about how much water they needed for the swamp, for building forests and lakes etc. At one point Paul came over to take a dinosaur but Miranda was firmly in charge and sent him to get more water. Clearly the children were enjoying themselves. Miranda, Christie and Mary went on building a dam until Mary, who was wearing open, dressy shoes and white lace

socks, looked down and saw her shoes and socks were getting muddy. Mary was clearly upset about mud on her shoes and went inside, where she spent some time cleaning herself with paper towels and then returned to the sandpit, but stood outside of it.

Miranda to Mary	*Come on we need water for the forest.*
Mary	*I'm not playing, this is dirty.*

Miranda continues to pour water but did not answer. Mary stood watching for a few seconds

Mary to Miranda	*Why won't you stop doing this?* (forcefully)
Miranda	*I like it.*
Mary to Chrissy	*Come! Stop now*
Chrissy	*No - I like this.*

Mary then spent the next few minutes trying to get Miranda and Chrissy out of the sandpit. I did not record all comments, but for sometime she stood quietly repeating over again *"Yuk! Yuk!'* or *'It's so cold.' 'Come on, come to the cubby!'* Eventually the girls left the sandpit and Paul, John and Yanni eagerly took over the place where the girls had made the swamps and left the dinosaurs.

On the one hand one could just consider the incident merely an example of shifting peer-power, Mary wresting power from Miranda, who at the start of this game was very much in control. The situation is, however, not that simple or neutral. Firstly, it must be acknowledged that Mary would never have been able to position herself so powerfully had not the other girls been exposed to a discourse in which it was not appropriate for girls to get dirty or muddy. But more significantly this subjectivity was not only confirmed by a subtle story about what 'should

be' - it was confirmed and reinforced by the children's own physical appearance and comfort. They were not dressed for mud pies and the evidence of cold wet sand seeping into one's shoes or sticking to bare knees is hard to ignore. Although I had made available waterproof smocks and gum boots many children, quite understandably, do not want to wear someone else's clothes, and so the availability of these items has little impact on their choice of play.

One could argue that boys are exposed to this kind of peer-pressure, in not aligning themselves with activity designated as 'female' but I believe the girls have an additional pressure. Both boys and girls may be put under psychological pressure by their peers but for girls this is very often compounded by a powerful physical pressure to maintain a particular subjectivity. Teachers can change children's clothes (not easily) but children must be given access to a confirming discourse if the change is to be maintained.

Some other incidents with Miranda showed clearly that she was actively struggling with the problem of identity being constructed by clothing and that she was anxious to embrace alternative discourses. The first episode was very simple. Miranda was dressing up and walked across the room wearing high heels and a man's suit. Amy stood watching, but said nothing. Miranda sensing some disapproval turned to her and said *"girls can wear jackets - you know"*.

The second incident involved the monkey bars. Miranda loved playing there and one day, as she was hanging upside down with her little cotton dress up around her ears, I commented how great tracky pants were *'because you could do anything in them. You don't get cold and when you fall over you make a hole in them - not you!'*. Miranda

laughed delightedly at this and the next day came to school wearing an old tracksuit. I made a mental note to myself that I must reinforce this with her when I overheard her telling Susan, who was wearing a smocked, frilly, calf length dress, that she wouldn't be *'allowed on the monkey bars'*.

Susan *Why not!* (forcefully)
Miranda *Cos you'll get cold, and we'll see your knickers and 'cos Mrs. Mawson said you can do anything in trackys*

While I have never mentioned anything about knickers, clearly this had been a problem in the past for Miranda and, through our conversation, I had empowered her to solve this problem. Miranda was positioning herself as powerful physically, by wearing the tracksuit, but also by creating a discourse which could be called upon when challenged ie. *'that Mrs. Mawson said you can do anything in trace pants..'* Miranda however, was very much the exception. She really enjoyed active play and needed only a little encouragement to change her dress. Her mother was well aware of the restrictions placed on her by the clothing and happy for her to wear the tracksuit. The majority of girls in the class, however continued to wear dresses, even as winter approached. And indeed some girls actually changed their dress habits to fit in with the dominant 'feminine mode'.

Chrissy's mother commented on the power of the gendered peer group since her daughter came to kindergarten.

> *Chrissy is much happier to wear dresses (and girls clothes in general) since starting Kinder. She has three older brothers and had always preferred to look like them (ie. wearing tracksuits, shorts, etc). I notice a subtle change in that she likes to look pretty now.*
> (Parent survey, April)

Chrissy's mother's comment that she seems 'happier' implies that in the past there had been some pressure and also some resistance towards the stereotype, but kindergarten had changed all that. Within the context of a family where everyone dressed comfortably and in similar clothes, it was easy for Chrissy to resist becoming embedded in the stereotype. Clearly there were more powerful forces at work at kinder, and indeed, in my ideologically sound kinder.

All my observations pointed to many different influences at work in the classroom, some more within teacher control than others. Teachers had little control over what parents said to children about school, or teachers, or how to behave when at school; nor could parents be told how to dress their children!

Some changes were possible and were introduced almost immediately. Tracksuits were introduced as part of the school uniform and I actively sought to change children's attitude to dress and play. The learning experiences were restructured to ensure all children had access to a balanced curriculum. The experience of trying to create a 'generic' Pretend Place left me in no doubt about how structured and directed that would need to be.

After the Circus theme, dress-ups became a Vet's Surgery and for a few weeks the children were directed to play there or in blocks. Block children and dress up children could play together if they wanted to, but girls were not allowed to opt out of blocks, or boys from dress-ups. It continued to be an uphill battle, even after a visit from a real vet. I had deliberately asked a young woman vet I knew to talk with the children before rearranging Pretend Place as a Vet's Surgery. The children asked lots of questions and seemed very interested. On the first day of our new

vet corner I sent Amy, Susan and Nathan to play there. As they started sorting through the props (the instruments, cages, masks and gloves) I heard Amy telling Susan that they were to be the animal nurses, and Nathan was to be the vet!! Girls may control Pretend Place because it is seen to be a site of female power, but who controls the girls' subjectivities? Amy's one experience of meeting a woman vet was certainly not enough to change the discourse she knew inherently, that women should be positioned in roles which support men. Of all my observations this was one which concerned me the most. Amy is a very assertive little girl (remember *'why do you always tell us what to do?'*) and short of ordering Amy to be the vet, and this seemed to achieve nothing, I found it very difficult to change her view of what options she had as a girl.

Teacher power is a doubled edged sword. I justify my use of this power to improve educational opportunity for all children, to allow them to see their own subjectivity as not fixed. But while I'm doing this, I seem only to be increasing the idea that teachers have a patent on knowledge; that their voice is the only authoritative one. There seems to be a real irony in this - on the one hand, I'm trying to get children to think for themselves, to see that they have choices and control, and on the other hand, I'm directing them more and more 'for their own ultimate good'. The very fact that every early childhood class has twenty five to thirty children means teachers are constantly imposing organisational practices which become constraints. As teachers we struggle not to make girls passive and compliant, but even in taking affirmative action we risk further dependence. It is important, however, not to fall into a way of thinking which sees resistance from children as inherently positive or

negative, for the consequences of such resistance are also contradictory. Resistance itself does not signify autonomy of thought, it may signify the exact opposite, a powerful struggle to maintain the status quo.

Conclusion

The research has highlighted a genuine struggle for understanding and for future directions among teachers. It has also revealed that the children themselves are in constant struggle to create or maintain a particular subjectivity, a struggle which is often not visible to the children themselves, or to the adults around them. There is a clear need to make visible and problematic for teachers and parents, this subtle process of struggle that children engage in every day in the classroom. This study however has raised a number of questions which remain problematic.

Firstly, how is it possible to effect any significant change to the way schools contribute to the creation and maintenance of stereo-typed gender roles, when it seems that this process is almost invisible to those who work in schools? For example researchers such as Willes (1981) and Kamler (1993) highlighted that the 'gendering working' done by teachers, as part of their usual practices to establish organisation routines and discipline, is not recognised by those teachers as gendered, but is seen merely to be the creation of a specific classroom discourse.

Secondly, my own research showed clearly that even when a teacher is attuned to this subtle gendering process it is difficult to make significant changes without challenging the underlying pedagogical beliefs which are the basis of 'teaching-as-usual'. For example - Is it possible to reveal the gendered nature of the choices children make in the classroom, if concepts such as 'child-centredness' (ie children 'freely

choosing' their own learning activities) remain unchallenged orthodoxies of early childhood teaching practice? Further, is it possible to restructure curriculum to ensure boys and girls have access to a balance of learning experiences if teachers beliefs about the gendered nature of children's abilities and interests, are not identified and examined in some rigorous way?

Thirdly, is it possible for teachers to recognise and intervene effectively against sexist practices or sex-based harassment if their own tacit beliefs about the innocence and 'naturalism' of children's behaviour, are not acknowledged and then, scrutinised in professional forums?

It is clear that for lasting change to occur it is imperative to establish these professional forums for teachers to examine such pedagogical questions. As it is teachers themselves, who must be prepared to introduce and sustain practices which will effect any change in schools, it is vital to first address and challenge teachers' own thinking. Clark (1990) maintains the basis for effective and radical change must be a re-evaluation of 'schooling as usual'. This process of re-evaluation clearly needs to begin at this most fundamental level. Teachers must be given opportunities for informed and rigorous consideration of what they believe about learning and teaching, and most importantly, how they came to believe this.

In the final chapter thus, the focus of this paper moves from the classroom and centres on the teachers themselves. The issues which are central to a successful professional development program for teachers are explored, with the specific purpose of providing a framework to change teacher thinking about gender and schools. The principles of feminist poststructuralism provide the lens through which this change is created

and implemented while critical educational theory provides the framework for practical action.

CHAPTER 4

TEACHER THINKING : A FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE

I know I'm not seeing things as they are: I'm seeing things as I am

There have been many excellent programs implemented in schools that have given girls and young women access to alternative discourses through a cultural studies approach (see Weedon's review, 1987, pp.140-151). The research project to which I contributed (Hiller and Langridge, 1992), also revealed a variety of ways to shift girls' thinking away from the gender stereotypes. There are however few such programs specifically aimed at teacher thinking. This final chapter is an attempt to suggest just such a program. The program is modelled on critical educational theory (Freire, 1970, 1972, 1973, 1978; Smythe, 1988; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990), and this theory is considered within a poststructuralist framework. Critical theory is seen as compatible with feminist postructuralism because it implicitly recognises that if one wishes to understand what happens in classrooms, it is first necessary to understand the people who are there. It asserts that the process of making explicit the beliefs, knowledge and subjectivities of the people who teach, is crucial to any process of radical change within teaching. Further, it makes available a discourse which is multi-voiced, complex and changing, and thus is particularly appropriate to understanding a process as subtle as the cultural and social construction of gender.

Teacher Thinking : A Framework for Change

If we consider how teacher knowledge and practice have developed it becomes clear that the task of instigating change will be a difficult one. Teachers have learned about teaching in a long apprenticeship of observation which began in childhood. Teaching is a unique profession in that sense - everyone knows about teaching from the students perspective, and indeed the knowing began and continued over a prolonged time, during one of the most impressionable periods in a person's life time. Buchmann (1990) refers to this process as the 'folkways of teaching', that is, the way we all acquire an amateur knowledge of teaching, while we are children in classrooms. Buchmann believes there are two important reasons why these models of teaching we imbibe as children, come to be so firmly entrenched:

> Teaching 'as usual' is reinforced twice by experience: by the experience of success in learning (if a partial intermittent, and unevenly distributed kind of success - which is just what common sense would lead one to expect) and by the experiences of participation, or the act and condition of taking part in activities with people. Doing things in concert with others leads to automatic readings of situations - inducing habitual meanings and actions - and is itself a powerful test. In schooling, at home, or at the workplace, it shows what does and does not work, often given ends that are limited and plain, such as 'getting things done' or 'getting it right'. These ends are seldom examined because of being obliquely affirmed in institutional structures and patterns of social life, supported for the most part, by common sense (pp.281-2).

Buchmann's work comes from the school of critical education theory and as Walkerdine (1990) points out, many feminist educators are acknowledging the relevance of such theory to the development of feminist pedagogy. What critical educational theorists argue is that a change in teacher thinking and hence practice, can only occur if teachers' beliefs about teaching are examined critically in terms of their historical and cultural development. A feminist poststructuralist perspective focuses on exactly this

- how cultural and historical structures position people within narrowly defined gender boundaries. Critical theory has particular relevance to a feminist poststructuralist understanding of how this practice works in schools because it focuses on teachers as professionals and their cultural and social histories. Critical educational theory, unlike other theories of teacher learning, acknowledges, just as feminist poststructuralism does, that much of teacher knowledge and understanding has developed as part of a 'tradition', rather than through some model of direct transmission. Jackson (1986) uses the notion of tradition to highlight the complexity of trying to define what becomes, because of historical and social precedence, a unified way of thinking and feeling. Like feminist poststructuralists, critical educational theorists recognise that the complexity of the process of coming to know or believe something, cannot be broken down separately into intellectual, cultural or social influences. Both theories recognise that only in uncovering tacit belief can we confront what we know, and use it well, or reject it.

Feminist poststructuralists (Davies, 1993; Gilbert, 1991; Weedon, 1987) have explored how using 'life histories' with adults and adolescents can uncover tacit belief and the creation of gendered subjectivities, while critical educational theorists (Su, 1990; Sikes & Troyna, 1991; Elbaz, 1991; Clandinin and Connelly, 1990) see life histories as a useful vehicle to uncover tacit belief about teachers' knowledge about teaching. These critical educational theorists, and others (Buchmann, 1990, Cunningham, 1977) do not acknowledge directly the connection between uncovering tacit beliefs and values through using life histories and understanding gendered subjectivities, but as a feminist and an educator concerned with the professional development of teachers, I believe the connection is an

important one. When teachers tell their own stories they confront more than their own knowledge, they confront who they are and how they became so. Understanding individual subjectivities is central to any understanding of gender and if one wishes to plan to change teacher practice or thinking and to develop a new collective understanding about this, then certainly the stories of teachers' lives need to be told and heard through access to a new discourse..

Some time ago feminists recognised how empowering it was for women to hear their own voices in the stories of other women's lives and, as is pointed out by Weedon (1987), this began a process of consciousness raising and saw the advent of 'women studies' groups in universities, as well as the wider community. My own understanding, that the most powerful and enduring learning occurs within highly charged emotional and social contexts, began with my first practical encounter with critical educational theory rather than feminism. At the time I was working in teacher education and I wanted to get my students to perceive their own school experiences in a reflexive way. I wanted to highlight important issues which students currently saw as only incidental to their belief and so decided this could best be achieved by using life histories. My purpose was not a serious research study of life histories but rather to increase my own knowledge of the students' existing beliefs and to give the students themselves access to these beliefs. I believed if the students understood how they acquired certain values and beliefs they would be in a good position to reflect critically on these.

Teachers Learning : A Significant Emotional Experience

My encounter with life histories was an interesting experience and significantly (to an increased understanding of how people learn) the students' recollections of positive experiences at school were almost always collaborative and social, while the negative experiences were all connected to feelings of humiliation or being singled out (See Appendix 1). However what I found particularly interesting was not what was recollected but how it was recalled. These life history classes were overwhelming emotional experiences. The sharing of the positive experiences was done with much laughter and shrieks of confirmation or agreement. The negative experiences were recalled with such emotion, that at times I felt I might have had to intervene. Some students became so heated, angry and in one case sad, that I was concerned that later this might cause them some embarrassment. At one session a mature-aged student became so angry when speaking of the perceived injustice of the actions, twenty years earlier, of one of his teachers that he was literally shaking with rage. At another session a twenty-one year old student seemed as if she was going to cry when she recalled how in Grade 3 she was never allowed to work with her friends, and as a consequence, she felt she was excluded from the group and that 'these girls used to spy on me'. Her manner, her tone of voice and her choice of words to describe the experience still reflected the powerful emotional experiences and perspective of the nine year old.

As the facilitator of the group I felt it was vital to move the life history discussion from an emotional level to that of an intellectual inquiry. This was not to defuse a highly emotionally charged situation, but rather to focus specifically on that emotion. I wanted these students of teaching to identify

for themselves that the context for learning, the manner in which they came to know or believe something, is critical to the impact of that learning.

The consideration of life histories as a part of legitimate teacher development programs raised for me two important issues. The first is an explicit awareness of the essentially *emotional* nature of any powerful learning situation, and the second that learning as a process of socialisation could actually be planned. The experience led me to ask; why it was that the emotional and social nature of learning is usually only intuitively acknowledged as a significant part of the learning experience, but is rarely used as a foundation upon which to plan specific learning programs? If it is accepted that learning to be gendered is a complex process of cultural and social positioning, then it seems logical that any attempts to counter this process must in some way replicate the socialisation process itself. In other words, attempts to change teacher thinking should occur within social contexts, not purely intellectual ones. As my own experiences with teacher education students showed, these powerful learning contexts may not be only social, but also emotionally charged. Indeed, it is fashionable in educational circles currently to talk about classrooms as 'communities of enquiry', but real communities are comprised of a great deal more than just 'intellectual' endeavour. Community learning is a subtle melding of the social, emotional, intellectual and the cultural.

Zhixin Su in a paper *Exploring the Moral Socialisation of Teacher Candidates* (1990) tackles this issue in terms of the pre-service education offered to teachers. Su points out that socialisation in professional schools such as business management, law, medicine and nursing has been studied extensively and it has been found that socialisation plays a powerful part in an induction to these professions. Su comments that despite this, there has

been no substantial examination of these processes of socialisation in teacher preparation ...'although there have been some research efforts directed towards the moral aspects of teacher socialisation, most have focused on situation-specific beliefs and attitudes, but not on the development of basic educational and professional beliefs, attitudes and values' (p.367).

I believe the Su study makes an important contribution to any consideration of what shapes teacher thinking. The study recognises the complexity of the process of teacher socialisation. Su's perspective, like that of feminist poststructuralists, is firmly based on a dialectical model of teacher socialisation. He believes there is a continual interplay between individuals and institutions and sees student teachers as active forces contributing to their own socialisation '...rather than slaves to past biographical factors, or present social structural elements .... the dialectical model views people as existentially related to their social structures. As people participate in communities, they actively construct meanings and significance of these encounters' (p. 370).

Once again the links between feminist poststructuralism are evident. Poststructuralist theory (Davies, 1993, Weedon, 1987; Walkerdine, 1990) sees individuals' subjectivities being constituted within constantly changing relationships - 'not only in ways of speaking and ways of making meaning, but also in the contexts and relations in which particular acts of speaking take place' (Davies, 1993, p.9). Critical theorists like Su sees people participating in 'communities through which they actively construct meanings'. The common tenet to both theories is that in seeking to understand what people believe, we must understand that <u>how</u> they acquired their beliefs is closely linked to an understanding of the social and historical context (the community) in which they learned. Both theories

recognise the importance of closely considering teachers themselves and the contexts which contribute to the creation of their subjectivities.

This really is quite a radical shift from existing models of teacher professional development which represent teaching as primarily a technical activity, one for which empirical regularities can be identified. And indeed it is an important shift in thinking which I believe some feminists, in their zeal to introduce new classroom practices, have also failed to make. A number of current gender equity programs which look at anti-bias curriculum and classroom strategies for equal opportunity (Derman Sparks, 1989; N.S.W. Department of Education, 1990; Perret, 1988) merely 'tinker' with surface issues because teachers' tacit beliefs, attitudes and values are not considered as the critical site for change. Teachers are willing to consider new ideas but if these are incompatible with their underlying beliefs about their own role or about gender then, faced with the pressure of day to day teaching, these new practices or ideas will be the first to be discarded. The problem which the critical theorists like Su (1990), Smythe (1988), Clandinin & Connelly (1990), and the feminist poststructuralists, Walkerdine (1990), Weedon (1987), Davies (1993), have identified, is the tacit nature of these beliefs, and hence the need for a commitment from those concerned with teacher development and feminism to plan experiences which help teachers to reflect critically on their own beliefs.

What I find particularly helpful about Su's study is that he does not just make explicit the difficulties of trying to define the parameters of an activity which is social, political, emotional and intellectual. Certainly it is important to highlight the problematic, complex nature of the enterprise that is teaching and learning. Indeed it is often a lack of recognition of this that has led to models of teaching which reduce the activity to the level of

recipes, of how to get from point A to point B efficiently. But Su takes the critical conversation further and suggests 'commonplaces' which should characterise any attempt to develop teacher thinking. The important starting point, he believes, is to plan experiences which move teachers to examine the conventional wisdoms which led them to their preconceptions about schools, teachers and gender (my addition) and on to the development of 'more informed, commonly shared and comprehensive views of the nature and purpose of education, schooling and beliefs' (p.368). Life histories, telling the stories of both childhood and teaching are the perfect vehicle for this critical reflection. Su's other 'common places' focus specifically on the relationships which develop within learning communities and the interactions between the learners, and it is to these which I now turn.

The Need for Mentors

Only in relationship can you know yourself, not in abstraction and certainly not in isolation

Krishnamurti

Understanding personal experience and history in creating individual subjectivity is only a first step. Empowerment and change begins with recognising that these experiences position one within a collective identity. Weedon (1987) comments that for women and girls it is through an exploration of personal experiences that a strong sense of identity as women can develop, and, that this collective process 'illuminates the interaction of the social and the personal on the one hand, and of history and a private experience on the other' (p.140). What emerges strongly from this understanding is the need for teaches to reflect critically with other teachers,

about their own teaching and to consider the role they play in constructing gendered subjectivities in children. An acknowledgment of the power of relationships among teachers is significant to the business of understanding and developing teacher thinking on a whole range of issues including gender. I believe Sue's commonplaces, which include 'critical personal reflection', the 'attachment to significant others', 'the development of strong peer culture' and the 'need for role models' as critical factors in teacher development, is one of the few serious attempts to recognise and to act upon what has long been considered only a hidden agenda. Su's study was directed at pre-service teacher education and it could be argued that the human relationships described in these 'commonplaces' are likely to be even more powerful during a time when young minds are impressionable to the influence from 'significant others'. However I believe an element of <u>any</u> situation where one is learning something new, is a certain vulnerability of the learner. Perhaps this can be explained more clearly in terms of a constructivist view of learning (see Bee, 1985). One of the key concepts of constructivist theory is the Piagetian notion of *assimilation*, i.e. that new knowledge can only become assimilated into existing structures when some element of conflict with the existing structures is set up. With any conflict there will exist some degree of discomfort, vulnerability - even more so for adults who see themselves as already knowledgeable and competent. From this perspective I believe it is reasonable to maintain that the relationships between learners will be critical to the 'success' of the learning. In simple human terms, it seems clear that most people like to be moved gently towards new understandings within an atmosphere of trust and sensitivity.

When we consider how contentious the issues raised by feminist post-structuralism are, issues such as - the subjectification of women to positions

of powerlessness; the notion that doctrines of liberal humanism are not innately equitable or neutral; the power relations among supposedly innocent children etc; it becomes clear that learning will be an uncomfortable and an emotional experience. As mentioned in the introduction, my own journey towards a clearer understanding of how gender is constructed has been a traumatic one. What was critical to this growth in understanding was a sense of being part of a collective understanding where the voices of other women, and other teachers were recognised as important sources of knowledge. And indeed, like my life history classes with the teacher education students, the women's studies groups I attended were characterised by the laughter and the voices of people telling stories about what they knew from their own experience. I am not suggesting that a study of gender does not demand some intellectual rigour, or knowledge other than that which can be acquired from women talking about their life experiences. What is suggested is that these communities are important contexts for learning because they allow teachers to create discourses not available to them within current teacher professional development models. It is acknowledged however, that there is a need for some framework which ensures that critical reflection is focused not just on the people who are learning, but what it is they do, i.e. their teaching. It would be illogical and self-indulgent to explore only 'humanness', or individual subjectivities, to the exclusion of the professional activity in which teachers are engaged. To this end I return to a model provided by critical educational theory.

Reflecting on Practice : A Framework

How can teachers focus in a critical and reflective way on something they are so embroiled in as teaching or as Cunningham (1977) would argue

in her paper *Teaching as Being: The right to Personhood,,* something which is inseparable from their being? It is clear that some framework for this exploration is necessary - one which recognises the contextual and personal nature of the teaching experience. Smythe (1991), I believe, provides this in his work Teachers *Theories in Action* . Smythe's critical questions which guided his research have a practicality about them which quite simply gets to the heart of the enterprise that is teaching. - What do I do? - What does this mean? - How did I come to be like this? - How might I do things differently? Straightforward imperatives for action. The first asks teachers to simply describe what they do. The strength of this as a starting point for teachers is that the question in a sense implies that only they themselves are the experts - no one else can answer this question and there can be no hint of failure. The only proviso is that the task is undertaken with the intention that this describing will necessarily be organised into a narrative which will help teachers to find their own voices, to describe those elements of their situation which confuse or perplex them. The essential point is that the teachers themselves choose what to focus on. In describing what happened in his research group during this process, Smythe highlights once again how teachers (if not educational researchers and leaders) recognise that the experience of teaching is not separate from that of 'being':

> Although it was not entirely clear to us at the time, what we had begun to do here was to strike out at the teacher education enterprise that has succeeded in promulgating a view that the act of teaching can somehow exist separately and apart from the lives, cultures, aspirations and problems of teachers and students. It was the practices, and the social processes they encapsulated, that we had started to describe and analyse (p.8).

An important element of this framework which differentiates it from Cunningham's notions of teaching being inseparable from 'being' is that these descriptions were undertaken not solely for the individual teacher's

benefit but also to give others access to it. This is significant because it is the first step in moving the conversation about teaching towards what could become recognised as shared beliefs and practices. And indeed this is the next stage in Smythe's process. Teachers who have described their practice to each other now need to ask themselves the critical question - so what? What does this all mean? It is at this point that the shared nature of the reflecting process becomes so obviously important. In listening to each other's stories of teaching, it becomes possible for teachers to inform their classroom practices in the sense of theorising or looking for broad explanatory principles that lie behind their actions '.... to get behind the habitualness and taken for grantedness of what we do, we gain a measure of control and ownership over what counts as knowledge' (p.10-11). I believe the empowering nature of such a conversation should not be underestimated - not only does it have the potential for teachers themselves to confirm and validate what teachers do, but it provides the opportunity for the kind of critical questioning which can bring about genuine change in understanding and in practice. It is the semantic space which women have needed, to explore in a rigorous way, the construction of a gendered subjectivity.

The next stage in Smythe's framework he acknowledges to be a lot harder to achieve than the previous two; actually positioning ourselves so as to question the comfortable world as we know and experience it:

> Describing and informing teaching is one thing, but a much more difficult task. Seeking to locate or situate teaching in a broader cultural, social and political context, amounts to engaging in critical reflection about the assumptions that underlie methods and classroom practice (p.12).

At this stage the collective nature of the inquiry can work in both a negative and a positive way. Working in groups during a critical confrontation or re-evaluation of habitual and therefore safe, practices could have a negative effect because of the natural inclination to protect oneself from situations of personal vulnerability. Apprehension, guilt or confusion are all emotions we would prefer to experience privately. Not many of us enjoy public 'soul-bearing'! However it is often only through someone else's perception of events that it is possible confront the reality of a situation. Further, to return to a point made earlier, whether it is preferable or not, significant and enduring learning often occurs in emotionally charged settings. Smythe believes at this confrontation stage, that starting with some historically located, sociological questions provides a means to interrogate teachers existing theories in a non threatening way, and can raise some important questions about contextual factors that surround teaching. And indeed these sociological questions could be the perfect vehicle to interrogate teachers' understandings about gender.

The questions Smythe asks are about teaching in general, but I believe they have critical value if rephrased to focus teachers on their understanding of gender and the part schools play in its construction.

Table 1

Critical Educational Theory asks teachers to consider	Post-structural Feminism asks teachers to consider
• What do my practices say about my assumptions, values and beliefs about teaching?	• What do these practices say about my my assumptions, values and beliefs about gender?
• Where do these ideas come from?	• What discourses have created these gendered subjectivities?
• What social practices are expressed in these ideas?	• What historically specific discursive relations and social practices influence my teaching in relation to gendered practices?
• What is it that causes me to maintain my theories?	• What is the constitutive force of social structures and language in creating gendered subjectivities?
• What views of power do they embody?	• How is social power exercised and how can social relations of gender, class and race be transformed?
• Whose interest seems to be served by my practices?	• Who has the most to lose if the current gender order is disrupted and reconstructed?
• What is it that constrains my views of what is possible in teaching? (Smythe 1987, 1991)	• What pedagogical discourses inform/ constrain teacher thinking and practice? How do cultural texts create and maintain the existing order within teaching? (Weedon, 1987; Davies, 1993; Walkerdine, 1990)

The next stage in the reflection process is that of reconstructing - or asking, what now? How might I do things differently? As Smythe points out, without action reflection of the kind suggested is of dubious value. This type of analysis can in fact lead to an informed decision not to act but equally it could result in a radical reassessment of priorities and ways of operating. Whatever the result the ultimate aim of a teacher development

program, that uses Smythe's framework as a model, must be to move teachers to the stage of planning for future action. Like all models, Smythe's suffers from an attempt to simplify what is complex and problematic, but I believe it is an excellent start. Smythe's model complements well the rich body of research presented by the critical educational theorists (Buchmann, 1990, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 1988, 1990; Elbaz, 1991) and the feminist poststructuralists, (Weedon, 1987; Walkerdine, 1990; Davies, 1989, 1993). Indeed, each has contributed in a unique way to create a rich understanding of the ways that teachers' own knowledge about teaching and gender can be used to inform and change the practice of other teachers.

Teachers Talking

There are people with games and stories to tell

(Playschool Theme Story)

The Smythe model is based on the central concept of dialogue between teachers, and of an internal dialogue or self reflection. At the heart of this lies the conversation of teachers - this is what determines the boundaries and patterns of the discourse. It seems important therefore that a teacher development program, based on teachers talking about teaching and gender, should aim to focus very closely not only on what teachers are saying, but also on <u>how</u> they are saying it. In a sense this new focus on teachers defining their own subjectivity requires that teachers reclaim the language of teaching from the 'outsiders' (the researchers, politicians, the media, the academics) who in the past have set the agenda. There is a need for teachers to identify and confirm the new voices in this continuing conversation. In recent times an attempt to do this has been made by a

number of researchers, both critical educational theorists and feminists, who are interested in the power of the story form in presenting and accessing teachers' and students' knowledge about teaching and about the construction of gender (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988, 1990, 1991; McAninith, 1991; Elbaz, 1991, Egan, 1986; Gilbert & Taylor, 1991; Davies, 1993). Clandinin & Connelly (1990) refer to it as the 'construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; learners, teachers, and researchers are storytellers and characters in their own and others' stories' (p.2). Davies (1993) sees the process of teachers telling their own stories as

> ... partly a process of retrieving the detail of one's specific personal history, one's memories, necessarily using currently available discourses to (re) tell them in the terms the current discourse makes possible ... it also involves a movement back inside the body, a movement back in time to another context, another way of thinking and feeling ... (p.177).

Both views encapsulate well the proposition discussed earlier that our understanding and knowledge about gender, or teaching, cannot be separated from the personal and social contexts in which these were learned. What the critical theorists argue is that this is exactly what most mainstream educational research and teacher development programs have done, i.e. separated so-called objective knowledge from socially and culturally acquired knowledge. Feminist theorists argue that this process of selectively validating particular types of learning has clouded our understanding of the process of the construction of gender. In other words, the powerful social, historical and cultural influences are not just negated by the current dominant ideology, they are rendered invisible through the creation of discourses, and indeed the creation of a very language, in which women are rendered powerless. Teachers are thus alienated from their own personal and practical knowledge by an academic discourse in the same way that

women are alienated from their own lived experiences by a discourse, which makes it appear 'natural' that women are in positions of subordination and powerlessness, and indeed by a language which actually renders women invisible.

There is a real liberation in the proposal that the story form is a legitimate and appropriate way to learn about gender and teaching. Stories are allowed to be emotional, moral, social, aesthetic, political - in fact they are just like how we learn and how we teach! Traditional research models and political discourses have given scant validation to the affective aspects of learning and teaching and so effectively they have denied teachers access to their own professional world and have separated women from the reality of their own experiences. Feminist educators (Walkerdine, 1990, Gilbert & Taylor, 1991; Davies, 1993.) have recognised how powerful traditional story-lines are in creating both patterns of desire and gendered subjectivities, in children and in teachers. My own work with young children (Mawson, 1992) and their readings of traditional fairy tales, showed clearly that children used the themes within the stories to interpret their own lives. Elbaz (1991) in a paper *Research on Teachers' Knowledge* argues that the story form is traditionally the way moral and cultural beliefs are transmitted and. as such, is a powerful way for teachers to access and share their own thinking and that of their colleagues. Davies (1993) comments:

> Teachers, like everyone else, interpret and make sense of the world through narratives, that is, through the story-lines of their culture. Story is one of our predominant modes of sense making ... Who we take ourselves to be at any one point in time, depends on the available story-lines we have to make sense out of the ebb and flow of being-in-the-world, along with the legitimacy and status accorded to those story-lines by others (p.41).

But Elbaz argues further, that 'for the notion of story to gain legitimacy we have to be able to show that story is that which most (my emphasis) adequately constitutes and presents teachers' knowledge' (p.3). What Elbaz is saying is, I believe, very important to discussions about the place of story in mainstream teacher development programs, which seek to further teachers' understanding about gender and schooling. For Elbaz, storying is much more than a device to explore a contentious issue or a methodology to make a particular point about teaching - story does not just link thought and action:

> Rather, the story is the very stuff of teaching, the landscape within which we live as teachers and researchers, and within which the work of teachers can be seen as making sense. This is not merely a claim about the aesthetic or emotional sense of it, of the notion of story with our intuitive understanding of teaching, but an epistemological claim that teachers' knowledge in its own terms is ordered by story and can best be understood in this way. This constitutes an important conceptual shift in the way that teachers' knowledge can be conceived and studied, and it is also (in my opinion) the direction in which the field should be heading (p.3).

I believe it is a conceptual shift which many feminists make intuitively. What I would argue, in proposing that storying should be at the heart of any professional development program which deals with gender issues, is that this reconceptualisation should be made explicit. The legitimacy of the discourse is diminished almost totally if it operates only at an intuitive level. Perhaps this is a sad reflection of the kind of knowledge society values, i.e. objective, sequential and measurable and this is partly due perhaps to teachers being conditioned in the school of logical positivism. It is time to give teachers, and particularly women teachers, access to a different discourse. In fact to give them access to their own voices.

So what can be done to empower teachers to hear and accept a new discourse about gender?

Conclusion: Finding a voice amid the unrelenting monologue

Where is that voice
it should speak up
when for a moment there is a pause
in the unrelenting monologue of the earth ..."
Zbigniew Herbert

It seems clear that those planning programs for teachers' professional development must ensure there is a pause in the unrelenting monologue! Teachers must be given some time to reflect on the manner of their knowing about gender. In fact, what is even more pressing, teachers must value time to reflect on this. Despite the fact that teaching is the only profession where the primary purpose is an intellectual one, teachers mostly just 'do'. The demands of day to day interactions with large numbers of children do not easily allow time to reflect, and indeed, few teachers would see this as a priority. But perhaps this is what is needed, a commitment to taking the necessary time to review taken-for-granted assumptions about learning, classroom practices, what is 'natural' and what is constructed through invisible discourses. Teachers will be more willing to make that commitment if they feel assured that these critical reflections will genuinely be focused on what matters to them. Why would a teacher be willing to take time from an incredibly busy work schedule to read or listen to, or converse about issues or ideas which, by the nature of the discourse, are rendered alien to their own understanding and practice? Teachers need to have the opportunity to

explore the issues raised by feminism and poststructuralism in a way which validates their own experience first, and then holds it open for scrutiny.

This is where we return to the notion of story. I believe story is the kind of discourse which truly allows the expression of teachers' experiences and concerns. Stories allow teachers to confront the dilemmas that teaching and traditional schooling present, in a way that academic or political discourse rarely does. Elbaz (1991) gives what I consider to be an extraordinarily rich summary of the ways in which the story form accommodates the complexity of teachers' experience. She acknowledges the tacit nature of teachers knowledge and highlights how important it is for any discourse which seeks to explicate this knowledge not to codify it, thereby risking distortion of meaning or vitality. Story, she believes, is the most appropriate way to give voice to this tacit knowledge which is:

> (i) non-linear;
> (ii) holistic and integrated (teachers intuitively attend to expressive, intellectual and social issues simultaneously in their classrooms);
> (iii) the patterning of something which is extremely complex; and finally
> (iv) imbued with a personal meaning which embodies 'bodily capacities, language, purposes, interests, social relations and aesthetic sensibilities.
> (Elbaz, p.11-12)

Elbaz argues that the story form, with all the possibilities the form includes, is the one really effective way to give voice to knowledge which is embedded in a context, in cultural traditions, in morality and criticism, and indeed is the only voice which can reflect the dialectical relationship between thought and action:

> ...with these propositions about teacher's voice in mind, we can see the relationship between story and voice on almost every dimension: first, the story told can be elliptical and rambling, and relies on much tacit knowledge to be understood; second, storytelling takes place in a context which gives meaning to what is said; third, it calls on traditions of telling which make possible certain kinds of story, with accepted structures for beginning and end, and so on; fourth, it very

> often involves a moral or a lesson to be learned; fifth, it is often a way of voicing severe criticism in a form that is socially acceptable or at least not dangerous to the teller; and sixth, the telling of a story reflects the inseparability of thought and action because it is simultaneously the making public of someone's thinking and also a performance in the real world: the story affects those who listen, and possibly also the teller, through the dialogue that may take place between storyteller and audience, sometimes even changing the story (p.16).

I find Elbaz's summary to be very powerful. She speaks with the voice of one who really understands teachers and teaching. Also I believe her analysis brings together, coherently, a varied and amorphous collection of ideas and research about teacher thinking, feminism and poststructuralism.

Under this umbrella of *story* I believe we can draw together the threads which make up our understanding of how teachers come to know about gender and about teaching. Weedon (1987, p.175) asserts that a feminist poststructuralist framework can be applied to all forms of social and political practice. I believe that an understanding of how storying can be used to help teachers reflect critically on their current practice is the much needed catalyst for a practical application of feminist poststructuralist principles to teacher development programs.

In this chapter, I have argued that teachers must be given access to new discourses if there is to be any significant change in the way schools contribute to the creation and maintenance of gendered subjectivities in students. It has been asserted that both critical reflection and storying could be powerful vehicles for achieving this. Clearly there is though a dilemma in how to give teachers access to alternative discourses when they are constrained to tell their stories and to reflect on these, within and through, the discourses to which they currently have access. Critical theorists such as Smythe (1987,1991) suggest that the use of historically located sociological

questions provide a means to interrogate teachers' theories about teaching and I have proposed that one way to give teachers access to new discourses about gender, is to ask teachers to consider the important sociological questions raised by feminist poststructuralism through a framework based on the critical theory questioning model. (Table 1).

I have also argued that, crucial to the success of any attempt to give teachers access to a feminist poststructuralist discourse, is the provision of particular kinds of contexts in which this process can occur. I have maintained that such contexts are created when teachers' own voices and stories are valued and developed, and when an understanding of that individual subjectivities are constituted within *changing* relationships, is seen as central to the development of any collective understanding about the creation of gender.

It has been argued further that the creation of these contexts is not merely the provision of intellectual forums where feminist poststructuralist ideas can be examined, but rather is the development of complete social, intellectual and cultural contexts where teachers' own experiences and voices are recognised and heard, and where teachers are genuinely able to confront current ideology and to consider alternatives, because the invisible discourses of that dominant ideology are layed open for scrutiny.

It is also however, acknowledged that feminist poststructuralism provides a discourse of challenge, and the creation of supportive contexts for critical reflection will not necessarily overcome resistance from teachers to the disruption of their firmly held traditional beliefs about gender and schools. My own experience, as outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 confirmed this. While the creation of supportive contexts which allow for critical reflection and examination of feminist poststruturalist principles is considered to be

vital, it is also recognised that sometimes it is only by changing institutional contexts, that changes in practice can occur. Giving teachers access to new discourses will not necessarily mean that they will change current practice, particularly if their current practice continues to be validated by colleagues and by the discourse of the popular culture. The mandate of power held by an institution may need to be invoked if the process of change is to begin, and if it is to be sustained. Institutions can and do change practice merely by legislation and while this may be a negative or minimalist approach, it is often the case that even forced changes in practice can lead to changes in attitude and outcomes. Indeed, sometimes it can be the only viable starting point. The relationship between practice, beliefs, attitudes and discourses is never simple, but when there *is* a change in practice, whether it be voluntary or mandatory, then an opportunity arises to create a context in which new discourses can emerge and where there is potential for a lasting change in attitudes.

In new contexts such as these, teachers are well positioned to consider the constitutive force of a patriarchal language and political and social discourse in creating gendered subjectivities and patterns of desire; to recognise the power relations which are inherent in traditional classroom practices and the school ethos; and to acknowledge the power exercised by cultural texts in positioning women as powerless. New opportunities arise for teachers' voices to emerge and to create forums where it is possible to establish a community of listeners, who attend to each other, and who speak in voices not separated from their own way of knowing, or that are polarised by a destructive or disempowering discourse . Such communities are able to create and share imagery and to work together on a rich tapestry of understanding which is communally woven, but never complete.

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APPENDIX 1

Life Histories Unit undertaken with 26 Year 2 Bachelor of Education students.

TEACHING STUDIES 2:

HISTORY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION UNIT

The purpose of this unit is twofold. Firstly, it is to give students an understanding of the historical contexts from which current belief and practices in Early Childhood Education emerged. In this sense it is an 'induction' to a profession, an opportunity to become part of an educational tradition and to understand how, and why it grew and developed, as it did. It also gives students a context within which to assess likely future directions in this field.

Secondly, students will be asked to reflect on their own personal educational history, as a means to making explicit underlying assumptions they have about what constitutes 'good' teaching or 'appropriate' educational experiences and then to share and evaluate these ideas.

Requirements

A. Interview a person who attended school in Australia during their early childhood school years. If possible choose someone who left school some time ago. Please record the dates and location (not necessarily the name) of the school.

Framework for the Interview

1. **Teachers:**
   What do you remember about your teachers, the principal?

2. **The Physical Environment:**
   What were the buildings like?
   What type of playground did you have?
   Did you have a desk?
   What equipment did you have in the classroom?
   How was the classroom arranged?
   Was there a library?
   Was the school heated?

3. **The Learning:**
   What do you remember about your learning?
   Do you think you were taught well?
   How long were the lessons?
   What were the reading books like?
   What happened when you made a mistake?
   What do you remember about different subjects?

4. **The Children:**
   How many were in your class?
   Did you work with other children during class-time?
   Did you enjoy playtime?
   Was bullying a problem?
   What games did you play?

5. **Discipline:**
   What happened if you misbehaved?
   What happened if you did well?

6. **Assessment:**
   How was your progress assessed?
   Were you given reports?
   Were there prizes?

7. **Parents:**
   Did your parents come to school?
   Into the classroom?

8. **Overview:**
   What are your most positive memories of school?
   What are your most negative memories of school?
   Do you think this period of education had a lasting impact on you?

B. Complete this questionnaire yourself.

Please bring to the seminar a written record of your interview with an older person and of your own recollections.

Outline of the Seminar where findings of interviews were shared:

Groups of 4:
Each member of the group shares their findings on each question.
At the end of each question one person to record the common responses,

e.g. commonly-held beliefs about teachers
common experiences with children
common experiences which were positive
common experiences which were negative

Whole group sharing:

- Under each heading: summary of common features, experiences etc.

Each group then shares their own educational experiences.

Different people scribe and record brief summaries of the various answers.

Whole group sharing:
common positive experience
common negative experiences

Comparison of the findings:
Discussion of implications for them as prospective teachers

Student Responses **Summary**

Positive	**Negative**
Working with friends	Grade 2 teacher who yelled at her.
	Teacher who didn't believe his side of story involving a dispute with another student
book conferences.	
Sport/ footy	
Comprehension cards	
Learning	Being left out
Maths	Being blamed unfairly
Reading	Unfair Teachers
	School uniforms
Playtime	Music lessons
	Being asked a question and not knowing the answer
	Having to eat all your lunch
Recess	Cross-country
Lunch time	
Play time	
Phys Ed/Sport	
School Plays	
Friends	
Debating	
Dancing	Homework
School Play	
Being top of class	Being blamed for things you didn't do
Art	Being made to feel different
Play time	
Spelling tests	
Table tests	

APPENDIX 2

Parent Survey

SANDY BAY INFANT SCHOOL
568 Sandy Bay Road
Sandy Bay Tasmania 7005

Phone 25 1580

Dear Kinder Parents

Currently I am researching how children come to adopt very specific boy/girl roles when they first enter school. I am very interested to know if parents can identify any changes in their child's behaviour or attitudes, since starting school, which may reveal whether the child sees the role of boys and girls as being different and/or separate.
I'm hoping you may share with me any observations you have made during these first few weeks of Kinder. If you have time to fill in the attached sheet it would be most appreciated but I understand also if you would rather not participate.
For those parents who are interested and who have friends with kinder children at other schools I'd be very pleased to supply extra questionnaires or hear their comments. I have attached two questionnaires for each child as I would be interested in responses from both parents if they wished to participate.
As with any observations made about children and shared outside, only fictitious names will be used and confidentiality totally respected.

It is a fascinating area and I have no idea what to expect but when I eventually write up the research I would love to share it with any interested parents.

If you would rather just come and talk to me about what you've noticed about your child - please do!

With thanks.

PERSON WHO FILLED IN QUESTIONNAIRE: (eg mum dad, nanna etc.....

CHILD'S NAME (first name only)----------

AGE: ----------

Can you recall anything your child has said, since coming to school, which may indicate that he believes there are some games/activities/clothes etc which are only for boys or for girls?

Since your child started school can you recall any comments made by your child about boys girls which seemed to show a change in attitude to the opposite sex.

Can you recall any changes in behaviour since your child came to school which seemed to sl a change in attitude to the opposite sex?

Any other comments?

Please return to Barbara Mawson at Sandy Bay Infant School

Appendix 2 (pages 140 to 148) of this thesis contain identifiable responses to a questionnaire. The pages have been redacted as they may infringe personal privacy.

Appendix 2 (pages 140 to 148) of this thesis contain identifiable responses to a questionnaire. The pages have been redacted as they may infringe personal privacy.

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Appendix 2 (pages 140 to 148) of this thesis contain identifiable responses to a questionnaire. The pages have been redacted as they may infringe personal privacy.

Appendix 2 (pages 140 to 148) of this thesis contain identifiable responses to a questionnaire. The pages have been redacted as they may infringe personal privacy.

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APPENDIX 3

Classroom Journal Notes

FEBRUARY/MARCH, 1993

[A.M. Saying goodbye]

Mum to G.F.	"Here (bag), I've put your fruit in the basket . Mrs N. will give it to you later. Now I've got to go but you be a good girl and do everything Mrs. Mawson tells you to".
Dad to N.H.	See you mate - have a good time.
Mum to C.B..	I'm going now darling - have a nice day.
Mum to N.J.	You have a good time N. I'll see you at 12.30.
Mum to S.G.	'Bye now - you be good for Mrs. M.
Mum to Douglas	Good - put away your bag Douglas. Now you do your name for Mrs. Mawson.
Mum to M.L.	'Bye Matt - see you later.
Dad to N.	See you - don't forget to make me that surprise.
Mum to Peter	Quick P., come on get out the puzzle - right 'bye.
Dad to S.T.	'Bye S. you get started now won't you.
Mum to P.C.	I have to go and see Andrew now. Now you do this O.K. (puzzle? name?) I think.
Dad to M.B.	Now leave me - I've got to go to work (clinging). You do what the teacher wants you to.
Mum to A.C.	Mummy's going now - no tears please. Show me a happy face - be a good girl.
Mum to ShiAnn	I'm going now. Now do what the teacher says.
Mum to Matthew E	I'm going now - you come and have a turn with the puzzles.
Mum to A.H.	Bye - have a good day.
Mum to C.M.	See you later C. Now be good - have a nice time at Kinder.

Mum to Z.	Now you be a good boy for Mrs Mawson and do just what the teacher says.
Mum to L.S.	Quick hurry up L. go and sit over there - you do what Mrs M. wants you to. Bye.
Mum to B.O.	I have to go now - no leave me - you be good - I'll see you later.
Mum to L.F.	Bye sweetheart have a good day.
Mum to J.	Have a good day J. I'll see you at 12.30. What about if you have a go on the computer.

Pretend Place **(March)**

Why do the girls seem to separate so quickly from the boys? Sarah, Anna don't seem to know what to do with blocks!

Today I tried to get Matt M. and Douglas to dress up and Matthew looked so uncomfortable I nearly laughed. He sort of hung around the edges with Mad. and Clare and eventually came and asked if he could go now!

Nicholas J., Damien, Zeke seem to be the only boys who actually like dressing up. Certainly they are the only ones who choose to go to dressups or stay there rather than moving to blocks. Nick always joins in when we take dress up outside.

The boys seem to only want to build traps, and forts etc. No response to circus theme from boys.

Lucy F. and Mad. played ballerinas using trapeze props and tutus!

Sophie, Lucy F., Sarah - domestic play (babies, mothers), shopping, phone.
Fight about being baby.
Lucy didn't want to.

Boys told to 'go away' when Matthew L. left blocks and came to watch.
When didn't Sarah threatened to leave.
Tell Mrs. M.

Monkey Bars **(March)**

B.G. (at principal's meeting).

"Yes there really is a problem, the boys really get filthy" - I've just said no - the girls will have to find somewhere else to play.

Week 3 (March 3rd)

I don't think having blocks and dressups together seems to make any difference about whether the children interact. The boys still seem to head for blocks and the girls for dress ups.

Sarah told Damian (Matthew L.?) she was going to 'tell' if he kept bothering them (Maegan and Lucy) but as far as I could see he was only watching.

- Perhaps I'll have to specifically send girls to blocks and boys to dressups?

- Lucy F. hates being the baby - Sarah, Anna, Clare, Maegan, Mad all seem to insist. Smallest child?

February/March

* Damien's comment to Clare.
- 'You're not allowed to play with girls'
- Why.
- You'd get into trouble.
- Not from Mrs. Mawson?
- No - but you just would.

APRIL, 1993

Comment from girl playing in dress up area. (Walking around the room wearing a man's jacket and high heeled sandals) to another girl:
"Girls can wear jackets you know"

Pretend Place of Blocks (April 9th)

6 kids - 3 boys, 3 girls. Girls in Dressups. Boys in blocks.
Girls playing families - S. telling baby (Lucy) what time it is - she doesn't want to be baby! ' I'm not going to bed' (L)
D. & M. come over from blocks to watch. M. 'I'll make tea' - Sarah - 'I'm doing that - you go over there'.

Setting: 12 boys in a circle talk.

What games do you like to play.

basketball	bikes	soccer
I spy	totem tennis	kicking the ball
hide and seek		

playing with Sarah
playing with Lucy

What kind of pretend games do you like to play

War getting the girls
army

Why do you like chasing the girls

'cos they scream!

Do they like it?

No - *why not?*
They don't like getting caught

Why don't boys chase boys?

Great laughter - literally falling over
No of course not

Why? "You can't catch boys cos boys run faster" "Yeah - boys are stronger"

I then asked the group about who were their friends at school. Every boy named 1, 2 or 3 other boys. I then asked

Can you have a girl for a friend

9 boys said no
Zeke, Damien and Nicholas J said yes.
Mathew L. - Maegan's my girl friend

This created a lot of laughter and I asked why that was funny. More laughter. I then told the children I wanted them to be serious and to really try hard to give me an answer because I was really interested. I then asked

Is having a girlfriend the same as having a friend who's a girl?

Nick. No cos you love a girlfriend and you're in love.
Great laughter

Interview ended.

Setting: 12 girls - Circle talk

What games do you like to play?

Mothers and fathers	swings
hide and seek	princesses
chasing textas	queens
bikes	babies
puzzles	mothers
yellow slides	tea party

Do boys play these games?

No - some boys do
"boys like to be princes"

I like playing chasing with boys
Do you chase - no
Why?
Cos girls don't feel like it

Why do boys chase all the time?
Cos they're boys
Cos they like kissing girls cos so they're pretty

Do girls chase girls ?- yes
We annoy them back

I asked the girls who were their friends and each girl named other girls. I then asked

Can you have a boy for a friend?
'No' 'No' 'No'
Anna. Yes you can. Aaron's my friend - but he doesn't chase me.
Belinda: "The boys are always trying to 'sex' you.

What does that mean? Kiss you.

How do you know someone's a boy?
short hair
don't wear dresses
they look different - because they're bigger
they kiss mums (everyone kisses mum)
boys play sandpit
sometimes boys want to be girls
sometimes girls want to be boys
sometimes they like to dress up
they don't have long hair
sometimes they get angry, and boss the girls, tease, and chase - Cameron
boys names
they've got a penis (R who came later)
you see it through trousers

Do boys and girls play the same games?
NO NO! (Chorus)
why not? - Cos they don't like to!
O sometimes you can play 'crashes' with boys and use the bed for a base

Do girls chase boys?
No, only if they're little

Why do boys usually chase them?

cos they like to play with you - only you don't like it
some girls are scared - they scream!
but some girls like to kiss boys and chase boys

Why do they like to kiss boys?

don't know
They really do hate us - they say "girls are stupid" "boys are good"
boys sort of chase us - they never say please but they want to like you.
They do it cos they want to play with you.

When the girls say don't do it the boys think they are just tricking, that you really want to be chased but I get worried.
they feel like they want to kill you

Are there things girls can do but boys can't?

ballet
pony tails
girls are better skippers

Boys want to just have no girls - only boys in our class

Why would you not want to have no girls?

They hate girls

Why?

Some boys say they're going to save us but they really want to kill you

Can girls be brave?

YES! They can say "Go away we're not going to play with you - I'm not going to play with you.
"You can say you'll dob"
"You can just stand still and then they go away and chase someone else"

Mystery Guest Program: Visitors to Assembly (April)

I noticed girls were not asking questions.
65 children: approx 20 questions, 3 girls asked.

Why is this so?
Not as inquisitive. Comment from staff member.

5 year old girl walking across playground talking to another 5 year old girl

"Why don't we get the guys to chase us?"
"Yes!"
"Guys are so cool"
(Lucy S. & Brigitte)

Alistair: 5 years 2 months (April)

Look at me I'm drawing vagina traps
(Repeated a number of times)
Asked by Teacher Aide) What are you drawing A?
Girl traps

Later at recess I was chatting to Alistair and asked him about his drawing.

Why do you like drawing girl traps?
Because it's fun!

Why do you call them vagina traps?
Because they're for girls

Are girls and vaginas the same?
Yes
Why do you like traps for girls?
Because they run away
So you chase them?
Yes
Do you chase boys?
No.
Why?
Cos they hit you if you catch them.
And girls don't?
No, you can just stop them and then someone gets up behind them and then we get them.
What do they do?
They squeal.

MAY

Chasing - outdoor - girls seem to be now doing some of the chasing (Lucy S, Br, Sar). They chased for a while but it always seems to end with boys (M., and M.L. and Y.) hitting them and girls coming to me for support. We've had long discussions about how you know if someone wants to play and how to say 'no' but it sure is slow work.

Tas. Devil incident (May)

Tiffany, Laura, Charlotte, Sally
chasing boys - and roaming
very rare to see girls doing the chasing - the devil seemed to symbolise power

Madeline's Mum (May)

chased by the boys
complains - but seems to like it
naughty boys

computer - the boys
not a lot of change in what boys can do, or girls can do
significant change when child had been to kinder in terms of clothing that is allowed/preferred
modelling of staff - comment - seems to copy clothing of teachers particularly (also mannerisms)

May 18th

Outside play seems to be deteriorating into this great random chasing game. The boys all seem to go in and out of a roaming pack. (Even Nick J. and Joel and Zeke are in it sometimes.) Lucy S. and Brigitte seem both thrilled and frightened to be chased. They're like seagulls - they duck and weave in packs!

'Sexing' the Boys

Mrs C-T is concerned that Belinda is frightened by the 'sexing' game. Evidently the kids refer to the chasing game as 'sexing'!!! She wasn't pleased.

How do you know someone's a boy?

Sophie: 'cos short hair
goes to St Virgils
penis

Do boys and girls play the same games?

sometimes
you need a boy to be the dad when you play mums and dads
cook the tea
if you're playing your own game and the boys come and annoy you then you have to get them to be something

Do you play games with boys?

Lucy S:
cos they come and chase
pinch behind my back
because we won't let them catch
Cody wants to kiss me
I hate it

Why?

I only like kissing girls

How do you know someone's a girl?

Zeke, Peter - couldn't answer
Math L: Girls have short hair }
curly hair } and boys do too
Why couldn't boys comment

Three boys and 3 girls playing in sandpit
John, Paul and Yanni, Chrissy, Mary and Miranda

Miranda is leading the play - the children have a number of buckets, spades and a hose in a large water bin. There is also a basket of plastic donosaurs and some cars and trucks.

John and Paul are digging in one corner of the sand pit. Miranda is directing the others.

Miranda: Quick - get more water - hurry it's getting away
Chrissy: Now get Tyrannasaurus out, he doesn't like water
Mary (with dinosaur): He's coming to swim in the swamp
Miranda: We need a forest - and a lake

The conversation continued along these lines between the three girls for a few minutes while Youssef responded to directions from Madeleine and Peter and Joel watched from the other sand pit. At one point Peter came to get a dinosaur and Madeleine rabbed the dinosaur from the puddle and said firmly, "NO - I've got it!"

The girls and Yanni continued with the dam building and then Mary, who was wearing patent leather shoes and white lace socks, looked down and saw her shoes and socks were getting muddy.

Mary: "Oh O, look - yuck."

At this point Mary left the sand pit and went inside. She spent some time cleaning herself with paper towels and then returned and stood next to the sand pit.

Miranda to Mary: "Come on, we need water for the forest."
Mary to Miranda: "I'm not playing this cos it's dirty"
Miranda continued pouring water and did not answer
Mary and Miranda: Why won't you stop doing this?
Miranda: I like it
Mary and Chrissy: Come on - stop now
Chrissy: No - I like this

Mary then spent time trying to get Miranda and Chrissy to come out of the sand pit e.g. "That's a stupid game" "Yuck" "It's cold" "Come over to the cubby"

After a short time the girls left the sand pit and followed Mary over to the cubby. Yanni, Paul and John continued to play where the girls had been until inside time (about 1/2 hour).

June Journal

Mathew: Can John and David play in the dark-room with me?
B.M.: Yes, that's O.K., no one else is there at the moment.

(The boys went straight into the darkroom and unbeknown to them Susan followed and tried to enter after them.)

Mathew: You can't come in here!
Susan: Yes I can! There's only three people, you're allowed to have four (at this point Susan forced her way into the darkroom. There was a short silence and then Mathew's voice was heard).
Mathew: Quick! X-ray her bosoms!